A SURVEY OF:
INTERNATIONAL TRENDS IN GOVERNMENT INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	13
Canada	15
Federal Republic of Germany	35
United Kingdom	47
France	59
Australia	69
Singapore	87
Japan	92
European Communities	94
Analysis and Trends	100

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTERNATIONAL TRENDS IN GOVERNMENT INFORMATION DISSEMINATION.

by Thomas B. Riley

INTRODUCTION

This survey of the information policies (paper and electronic) of seven countries, Canada, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan and Singapore and one international organization, the European Communities (EC) has been done as part of the Office of Technology Assessment's study: "Technology, Public Policy and the Changing Nature of Federal Information Dissemination". The purpose is to assess the policies of the countries studied and determine what the OTA can learn from experiences in other countries. Another purpose is to ascertain whether or not any of these countries have progressed beyond the United States in the developments of their electronic information policies.

The study has determined that the United States has evolved further than any other of the industrialized nations in disseminating government information through electronic networks. This has been determined through a survey of the countries who are major players, including Japan.

CANADA

Canada, along with the Federal Republic of Germany, can be considered being second, behind the United States, in their attempts to develop electronic databases disseminating government information. Canada has conducted more studies on how to disseminate their information. Two task forces in the late nineteen-sixties had recommended many ways for Canada to improve the dissemination of government information.

One recommendation, made by the Glassco Commission, was the setting up of a national information body. Prime Minister Trudeau accepted this recommendation and Information Canada was born in 1970. Its major purpose was to set up outlets across Canada to sell government publications and communicate government programs and policies to the Canadian public as well as act as a sounding board for Canadians who wanted to communicate to Ottawa about government policies. It also served as a central information unit for the production, creating and

dissemination of all government information. Information Canada was closed down in 1976. There were many reasons for its failure part of it being for economic reasons and disenchantment with the system by both the public at large and politicians.

Information is mainly published by the Canadian Government Publishing Centre(part of the Department of Supply and Services), who act as the Government Printer. This Department replaces what was formerly known as the Queen's Printer. Government publications are sold through booksellers across Canada as well as their own bookstore in Ottawa and through direct mail. There is no central information body in Canada and individual departments handle the dissemination of their own information and public relations programs. Canada also has the depository library system which guarantees widespread dissemination of their information.

Over 70% of government printing is now done outside by private contractors. This is part of the Government's fiscal restraint policies and move to give as much to the private sector as possible. There are many issues surrounding the depository library system. The Canadian Government Publishing Centre sends out a weekly list of publications to about 1300-1400 libraries(in Canada and abroad) who are part of the system. There are 60 libraries who are full depositories while others participate in varying degrees. The government is looking at ways to improve the system, especially in light of the new technological developments. There is a move to send things to the libraries on diskettes(in addition to the traditional forms in which government publications are now sent, including microfiche). The government is considering an educational program to raise the awareness of Canadians about the depository library system and what government publications are available through the system. This is part of the new attitudes concerning access to government information.

An Access to Information Act allowing citizens the right of access to government documents was implemented in 1983 and is working quite successively though a Parliamentary Committee reviewing the Act felt it still had too many clauses restricting access to information. The government did not accept the majority of the recommendations to improve access, opting instead for limited administrative amendments and some educational programs. The act is considered one of many policy instruments whereby citizens can gain access to government information.

Canada does not have a coherent information policy nor has she developed a national electronic dissemination

policy. The Department of Communications is currently conducting numerous studies to develop an overall communications policy. Studies are expected to be released in early 1988 and one priority is to develop some form of a policy regarding accessibility of government databases by the Canadian public.

Currently, Statistics Canada has the most sophisticated database of government information available to the public both through direct access and through information broker companies. All government departments have major databases (true of all countries studied) but few allow access by the public. Question Period from the House of Commons is available through an electronic database and the DOBIS system in the Canadian Parliamentary library offers an extensive bibliography and information system. The University of Guelph, assisted through government funding, has a system called CODOC, which has the most extensive collection of government publications in comparison to any other system in the world. It includes many countries beyond Canada.

WEST GERMANY

The Federal Republic of Germany has no single institution which disseminates government information to the people. They do not have any retail outlets across the country which sell government books, seen as a major weakness in their information policies. They have developed extensive outlets for the daily proceedings of the Bundestag (Parliament).

There are different outlets responsible for the production and publishing of government information. Individual departments have their own public relations departments which are responsible for communicating the affairs of the department through many outlets. These departments also publish publications, most of which are on a free list, to names which have been developed over the years. This has been considered a policy weakness as it means accessibility is limited.

The Federal Centre for Political Education is responsible for communicating information about the affairs of the Bundestag. It accomplishes this through many different means, including wide use of films, advertising and radio and tv. It publishes a weekly newspaper called DAS PARLIAMENT which reports the events of the week in parliament and conducts interviews with politicians.

The Press and Information Office are responsible for issuing press releases and briefing the press on the affairs of the government and interpreting events that are occurring in West Germany and national issues which impact

on foreign affairs. West Germany also has a depository library system which assists in getting government information to the people through the library system. This does require a certain expertise on the part of the user and what is missing is bookstores in which citizens can come and browse through government publications and purchase them as needed.

The laws, regulations and statutory instruments of the Federal Republic are published in two official gazettes. The proceedings of the Bundestag are also published overnight and available for sale but in limited numbers.

Where West Germany has excelled in the development of their information policies is in the establishment of specialized information programs. These go back as far as 1974 and concern getting specialized information vital to different sectors of West German society into the hands of researchers, businessmen, professionals, academics and others who need the information. Specialized information databanks, references and bibliographic sources have been established in such areas as: health, the environment, the economy, energy, chemical substances and international information.

The means for disseminating this information is not only through electronic databanks (though this plays a large part) but through periodicals and reference books. Computing Centres have been set up around Germany to achieve this goal.As well specialized centres like the Medical Information Centre (DIMDI) and the legal Centre (JURIS) have been established.

The Specialized Information Program, 1985-1988, set up by the Federal Minister for Research and Technology lays out the purposes for the program, which includes the need to keep West Germans abreast of the latest information in Germany as well as have access to the latest specialized information from abroad. The program exists to contribute to and strengthen the West German economy as well as strengthen science and research and improve the parliamentary research system by bringing more up to date information on line.

The government wants to improve world wide access to West German information and secure access for West Germans to information in databanks in other countries. There are problems in achieving these goals because of language, history and national barriers. For this reason, the Federal Republic is working closely with international organizations such as EC, UNESCO, WHO and others. Much of the specialized information from West Germany is available through EEC data banks and the government wants to continue to work closely with them. They support the EC goals of

making information of the EC member countries available online to not only all member countries but to all their trading partners.

Though West Germany has no freedom of information act (and no prospects for one in the near future) they have developed intelligent information policies. Like most of the industrialized nations they are sensitive to the necessity to keep abreast of developments in the Information Age. Like the United States, West Germany continues to assess their dissemination policies. Their specialized information program does not just deal with government information but acts as a means to assist the private sector. To this end millions have been earmarked for the program.

West Germany has not developed one institution responsible for all their information policy partly because of fears by many that such an institution could become an outlet for party propaganda. This has been resisted because of their history. These is no likelihood of one being developed in the near future.

UNITED KINGDOM

The United Kingdom has been developing information policies for the last three centuries. It is in this century that the policies as they now exist came together.

The UK is an interesting study as it is one of the first countries to have named a Minister for Information Technology (1979) but their main thrust has been on developments in the private sector. Though there has been attention on the use of information technology within government it has not been used to develop policies to better disseminate information, electronically, to the public. The UK has a history of administrative secrecy (some say it is the worst amongst the industrialized democracies) which has had some effect on its information policies. The ubiquitous Official Secrets Act, which requires official permission to be given by a government official for the release of any type of information, is often cited as one of the main barriers to improvements.

Despite these restraints two main institutions have evolved which produce, publish and disseminate information to the public: Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO) and the Central Office of Information (COI).

HMSO has been in existence since the last century. Information was originally published by the private sector. Hansard (named after its founder) published proceedings of the House of Commons and the House of Lords up until the early twentieth century. The official government publisher

was allowed to see government publications and retain the profits. This practice was stopped early this century.

HMSO not only produces and publishes government publications but it is also responsible for government copyright. It is responsible to a junior Ministry in the Treasury. It sells its books through HMSO bookstores established throughout Great Britain's major centres and through retailers in other centres. It is also unique in selling British publications overseas through foreign retailers. It has an extensive network.

HMSO espouses the philosophy of having outlets to sell its publications in major centres near the hub of a city's activities. Publications are sold on a cost recovery basis and, on the whole, this goal is achieved. All statutes, Hansard, proceedings of Parliamentary Committees, White and Green Papers (government discussion papers) are available through HMSO. Much of their stock is now on computer or microfiche though information through them is not available on electronic databanks. HMSO discourages free lists.

Though HMSO claims to sell all government publications, and be the majority seller, in fact, a 1978 survey showed that only 30% of government publications were sold through HMSO. This is because individual departments, who have their own public relations offices, are allowed to sell their own publications though on occasion agreements are reached with HMSO for the latter to sell them. The individual PR departments of Ministries not only issue and sell publications but they also issue press releases concerning government programs of the day or in response to certain issues.

The British are careful to ensure that political statements made by Ministers are issued through Party headquarters and not through the Minister's department. This is based on the tradition of civil service neutrality. It helps to explain how central organizations such as HMSO and Central Office of Information (COI) have survived. Neither organization has ever been perceived as a propaganda machine for any government of the day.

The Central Office of Information (COI) is the central body disseminating information to the public in Britain as well as overseas through information officers in embassies and high commissions abroad. The COI has programs to educate people on government programs of the day in all areas of British life. One such example is the recent national educational program on AIDS. The COI emerged from the Ministry of Information set up at the beginning of the Second World War but dissolved at the end of the hostilities to become the COI.

The COI provides audio/visual services as well as advertisements for newspapers and periodicals and a host of other services. It has come under criticism of late for being too slow and cumbersome to be cost effective.

Another means of gaining access to government information is through the Public Records Act. This allows for the release of departmental records after thirty years, with certain exceptions where the national security could be injured, could cause harm to the public interest and invade an individual's privacy. The media and many researchers and academics make use of this statute to gain invaluable information from the Public Records Office.

The Central Office of Statistics has a large database which contains extensive economic, industrial, agricultural, population and other relevant information. This is accessible to the public as well as through information brokers. The same information can be found in EEC databases. As Britain is a member of the EEC it is anticipated that further forms of electronic dissemination will be evolved by the British government in order to come into alignment with their EEC partners.

There is a Data Protection Act in the UK which allows citizens access to their personal files in automated data banks in both the public and private sectors. This Act does not relate in any way to the dissemination of government information and its existence, in Britain as well as other countries, has not meant attention has been paid by administrators to develop such policies. They are perceived as acts which protect data not disseminate it. The United Kingdom does not have a freedom of information act (nor is it likely to get one under the current administration). It does have the depository library system.

FRANCE

France has sophisticated information systems but no one central institution that oversees information policy. It has a freedom of information act, enacted in 1978, which is working well an is considered an instrument that has worked to allow more dissemination of government information to the French people. A committee studying the need for wider information policies in the early nineteen-seventies had recommended that more open government was important for France.

As to the history of their information policies, the country's information dissemination was disrupted with the second world war. The lack of a central coordinating unit can be partially explained by the experiences of the second world war and the determination not to create one

organization that could be the outlet for government propaganda.

Different institutions have been created to handle specific functions. The Prime Minister's Office has under it the Service d'Information et de Diffusion. This body is responsible for press briefings and interpreting government policy.

The Imprimerie Nationale is the national printer but the most famous outlet of government publications is Documentation Francaise. It produces, creates and sells government publications. One basic flaw is it does not have major outlets outside of Paris. This has been considered a stop to many Frenchmen having access to government information as it means there are few administrative documents available outside of Paris. Many consider this part of the attitude that specialized government information is used mostly only by the intellectuals: i.e. the academics and the professional.

It has a broad mandate and is similar to the Central Office of Information in the United Kingdom. The Documentation Francaise (DF) is responsible for interpreting government policy, helping individual ministries in their information programs and dissemination of information, explaining ministerial policies and producing government publications. It also publishes the proceedings of the National Assembly.

Statutes, government regulations and government notices are published in two Official Journals of the Government. The other information organization is the Commission on Access to Public Documents which is the body overseeing the Freedom of Information Act (enacted 1978) and to whom complaints are laid under the Act. It liaises with departments over what information can or cannot be released. It sees as part of its mandate the duty to ensure citizens receive the information to which they are legally entitled and in this respect act as an instrument assisting in the disseminating of government information.

BIPA is the one central data bank that came up as a result of an online search for government data banks accessible to the public. It is operated and accessible through the Documentation Francaise. The unique feature of the system is that it deals solely with political matters and has on it such information as debates in the National Assembly, minister's speeches since 1963, government press releases and government policies. It appears to deal solely with political matters and is not all encompassing like West Germany's specialized information program.

There is no indication at this point as to how far France has developed electronic information policies or how far they will go. But as a member of the EC much of their statistical information would be in EC data banks. Developments of their policies could be heavily influenced by developments in the EC and OECD.

AUSTRALIA

Australia was very late in developing national information policies. The Commonwealth of Australia did not come into being until 1901. Because of this the six States had developed their own information policies. It was not until 1962, when a Parliamentary Committee was formed, did any cohesive policy develop. Part of the reason for this is the States were doing well in disseminating their information and were also selling Commonwealth (Federal) publications.

As a result of an information study in 1963 government Inquiry Centres were established in all the state capitals across Australia. The centres sell government publications and answer queries from the public about government and government programs. They are considered very successful and can be found near the centre of the major cities. This reflects the philosophy that for inquiry centres to be useful and valid they should be near the hub of activity of the city. Where inquiry centres do not exist the Government sell their publications through retail outlets.

Parliamentary speeches and proceedings are published through Hansard, as in other Commonwealth countries, but they are not widely available and tend to be difficult to purchase.

As in most countries individual departments have their own public relations offices which also disseminate their information and develop their own free lists for distribution. These offices also handle their own press releases, briefings to the press and advertisements and broadcasting of department programs.

Australia has a Freedom of Information Act (enacted in 1982) modelled on the U.S. FOIA. It guarantees citizens a right of access to documents with certain exceptions. Though it was originally seen as an instrument of wider accessibility to government information this has changed recently due to reform initiated by the Labour Party government. Changes to the Act requiring stiff user fees has resulted in fewer requests but reflects the user pay philosophy of many governments today. The country also has the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO) which disseminates its own information.

The Australian Labour Party Platform of 1983 called for the development of a National Information Policy. Subsequently, in 1985 the Minister of Science produced a discussion paper on the subject based on research papers and a national workshop forum.

The paper recognized the need for Australia to have a coherent information policy in order to meet the challenges of the information society. It especially recognizes the need to support the private sector in this regard and sets out ways to achieve this objective. It is also sensitive to the fact much information in databases comes from abroad and much Australian information gets sent abroad. This raises the transborder data flow issues such as sovereignty, privacy and copyright. The paper recognizes the necessity for the government to remain sensitive to these issues.

One overriding concern of the government is the sensitivity to the "information rich", those who can afford to access the information because of education, intelligence, financial resources and other societal factors, and the "information poor" those who, because of different circumstances, cannot access such information. Many involved in the study felt it was important for government to take a role while others felt it was not necessary to interfere as policies are already being developed in other sectors which address the problem.

There has been no response since the 1985 Paper though a statement from the government can be expected. Their large statistics database was closed down in late 1986. This could be an indicator that it might be sometime before a national information policy is developed because of current fiscal restraints within government.

JAPAN

Japan was included in the study as it has been perceived by some that they might be the leaders in the electronic dissemination of government information. In fact, the Japanese government do not use electronic systems to disseminate their information and , as far as can be determined by experts in Japan, no government databases are available to the public. Japan follows traditional methods of disseminating government information. There are government bookstores in major towns and cities across Japan. There is an organization called the Japan External Trade Organization, funded by the Government, with eighty offices around the world. JETRO makes available in English, and sells, information about Japanese trade and industry.

SINGAPORE

Singapore has many official government publications. As a small trading nation (population of 2.5 million) strategically located they are sensitive about getting information on their republic into the private sector and foreign companies. Their main publisher is Singapore National Printer, responsible for disseminating government information.

They have a national Computer Board and much tourist and industry data is on line in Singapore. They have a depository library system but it is spotty.

It is expected that they will develop a national information policy but for the moment they are behind other countries surveyed in this study.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY (EC)

As indicated throughout the study the EC has four major databases which contain important economic and statistical information reflecting all sectors of society in their member countries. The databases exist because of the desire for the member countries to remain competitive with their trading partners and the rest of the world. They are the main instrument for the electronic dissemination of government information in Europe.

The development of future policy will hinge on the findings of the various EC committees looking into the various issues surrounding the flow of information across international borders. They are sensitive to all these issues though the EC has rejected a call for a freedom of information policy. This mirrors the basic philosophy of the major member countries: that governments shall decide what information shall be released to the public not vice-versa.

CONCLUSIONS

It is important when studying the dissemination of electronic information to take into account the development of the world information economy. This is the term used to describe the flow of commercial information internationally, the effect it has on business and how we have moved over to an information age and to contribute to the health and growth of their respective economies.

The United States is the clear leader in the dissemination of government information electronically and many countries look to it for a leadership role in this respect.

There are many questions which have arisen when studying the implementation of policies. These reflect national and international concerns.

Are restrictions needed on the flow of information internationally? Are international treaties and organizations needed to ensure the continued successful exploitation of the emerging information technologies? Who should oversee national information policies and their implementation? Should it be one institution, thus creating "information Czars" which could reflect poorly on democratic institutions? Or should information policies be developed by governments by implemented piecemeal by individual departments to avoid abuse? How much money should be allocated to the development of electronic information policies?

These are but a few of the questions raised. What is clear is we are rapidly moving, due to the new technologies, into what could be termed the "Quick Fix" Age, in which administrators, businessmen, politicians and others want solutions immediately. This will depend on information being electronically available and accessible, economically, in a comprehensive and digestible form.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study has been to survey various countries for the their existing information policies and, in particular, to determine developments towards the dissemination of electronic information.

As the focus of the OTA study has been on studying the "Technology, Public Policy and the Changing Nature of Federal Information Dissemination ", in the United States, with the view towards recommending what new policies might be forthcoming to facilitate this, careful attention was paid to what degree these countries studied compared with the United States. It is evident that the U.S. are the leaders in electronic dissemination and only Canada and West Germany come close to what they have achieved. Even these two countries are still, in the words of one information broker, ' light years behind what the U.S. government have achieved.' Japan does not disseminate their government information electronically, according to interviews with experts from that country.

Existing resources and time constraints has changed the focus of what the original intention of the study had been. Egypt had initially been included in the study but research proved no information was available on their policies and to gather materials would have extended well beyond the time limits of this study. Key countries surveyed to great effect were: Canada, Federal Republic of Germany, United Kingdom, France, Japan(to a certain extent) Australia and Singapore(the latter two also included due to the opportunity to survey them on the spot and conduct some personal interviews in these countries). The European Economic Community (EC) was included as the international organization as it has developed sophisticated means of disseminating their information and making their databases accessible to users throughout all their member countries and to their trading partners.

This paper looks at all aspects of dissemination of government information with the view to contributing to the perspective of the wider OTA study.

The paper concludes with an analyses of what was found and the current trends among these countries as well as suggestions as to what directions electronic dissemination might take in the future and the current state of the general dissemination of government information.

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CANADA

INTRODUCTION

Canada currently has the standard methods of disseminating government information found in most western democracies. The functions are the responsibility of the Department of Supply and Services, individual departments and agencies. These include the normal methods of dissemination: The Canada Gazette(containing government notices, statutes, regulations and statutory instruments and orders-in-council, amongst others); sale of government publications through private bookstores across Canada; standard press releases, from Ministers and release of government publications and information about programs and press releases through individual public relations departments in different government departments and agencies; Hansard, the official record of the proceedings of the House of Commons and the Senate and their Committees; the depository library system; access to electronic data bases for use by the public and the Access to Information Act (similar to the U.S. Freedom of Information Act).

The means of dissemination of information to the public has been the source of much debate and discussion over the decades. Canada has two official languages, English and French, and an official bilingual policy which necessitates all publications produced by the Federal government be in both official languages.

ELECTRONIC DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

(Note: As of this writing the Department of Communications is undertaking a comprehensive review of all federal government communications policies. This will include a review of the best methods to disseminate government information to as wide a public as possible across Canada. However, none of the research material is currently available as the department will not report until late 1988. Initial reports are expected to be released starting in April, 1988. One policy area carefully being studied is the making available of wide amounts of government information on government data bases. Statistics Canada(as described below) is currently making large amounts of information available to Canadians through their databases. Federal officials want to see the same occur on a much wider basis. The Department of Communications Report will deal with this whole question.)

Canada currently has no coherent, uniform federal government policy on the electronic dissemination of information. There are individual databases in different government departments , such as Statistics Canada, but no consistent means of disseminating information electronically to the Canadian public. Every federal government department has a data base but in the majority of cases they are for internal use only. However, research into the policies of electronic dissemination of government information shows Canada to be second(along with the Federal Republic of Germany- see below) in the world, behind the United States, the acknowledged leader, in getting data out electronically to users.

This scenario is intended to change, as noted above, as the Department of Communications is currently doing studies which will result in methods of disseminating information electronically from the Centre (ie Ottawa) to the periphery(ie the rest of the country.) Apart from doing studies on the use of microprocessors, the developments in CD-ROM and desktop publishing the intention is to produce a comprehensive communications policy for Canada.

DATABASES: WHAT'S THERE? WHO GETS IT?

Steps have already been taken to make information available. The Department of Regional and Industrial Expansion currently has a database, called the Business Opportunity Sourcing System, that lists approximately 18,000 Canadian manufacturing companies and their products. This system enables businesses to register their products and to source what products other companies are producing.(1) However, every major government department has significantly large databases but few of these are available to the public.

The Library of Parliament is currently developing an on-line research system to be available to Members of Parliament and Senators and their research staff. The purpose here is to improve the accessibility to information of Parliamentarians which in turn should improve the parliamentary system. The Library of Parliament research staff have prepared videos , using experts in the field, in different statutes, in order to educate parliamentarians on complex issues. One such video concerned the usage of the Access to Information Act. Participants included the Federal Information Commissioner, a well -known national journalist and activist lawyer. It was well received in Parliament. The Library also has built a data base of outside experts and consultants which can be called upon by Parliamentary Committees for expert advice. These are just some of the

uses by the Canadian Parliament which , along with most Federal departments, is becoming completely computerized. This trend started with the advent of the microcomputer and the emergence of the microelectronics revolution. Their DOBIS system, listing extensive publications throughout all the government, is accessible to all staff and information from the system is available to the public(2)

Hansard's daily record of Question Period(when the Opposition has the opportunity to question the Government in the House of Commons) has been computerized. It is accessible to the user through QL Systems. The base is in English and French and is useful to the user in tracking the political history of an issue in the Canadian Government. It covers the period from 1973 to the present. This database is different from the electronic distribution of the Congressional Record as it covers only question period in the House of Commons.

Telidon, a national data transmission system, was originally hailed, in 1981 and 1982, as being the vehicle which would bring all available government information to different publics in all regions of Canada- from the high density areas of the big city to the smallest village. However, at the time of implementation the technology to make information accessible on a wide basis was not available. Information on the system had to be read like a book. The idea of using Telidon to disseminate information was dropped.

Experts recognize that the approach to electronic dissemination of information is piecemeal. One question that has arisen is: if the US Library of Congress goes on line will the Library of Parliament continue to receive the services they do now(such as the information received in catalogue(paper) or microfiche form) ?

This is but one of many questions to be answered as countries increasingly go on-line and begin to consider their own sovereignty questions and the accessibility of their data to foreign countries. This is important to consider in light of the US policy on scientific research and transfer of technology. In a wider way, the question raised in Canada broaches the question of to what degree will countries consider it necessary to protect their own internally produced information in order to safeguard their sovereignty? This is a transborder data flow question. Though this issue was the subject of an intergovernmental task force a few years ago, in 1982,(resulting in no universal agreement by the Committee on the issue) it has not been a subject of interest in the last few years. Continuing transference of paper files to electronic data bases and the development of a national information policy by Canada could raise this issue again.

Many departments have individual data bases with all categories of information- ranging from health information to the latest weather forecasts and other such precise data. However, it is available by sector(and all on a cost recovery basis). There is no single agency which co-ordinates all information functions thus leaving the individual public person to go to the experts to retrieve government information. This is common in all countries studied and is not restricted to Canada alone.

For example, I.P. Sharp and Associates of Toronto, an international on-line vendor of information makes available to consumers the Statistics Canada database CANSIM. Other companies, such as Compusearch of Toronto(an electronic research firm) and SVP Canada/Business Centre(a division of Micromedia Ltd.,) Canada's biggest information broker, supply information to clients from Statistics Canada databases and other databases publicly accessible. Compuserve, considered to be one of the largest databases in the world, draws upon government databases. They are on-line vendors providing information to the public.

One of the most extensive bibliographic database of government publications/documents in the world(outside the U.S.A.) is an on-line service produced by the Library of the University of Guelph. This reference bibliographic database contains about 700,000 citations to the combined government publications collections of 11 Ontario university libraries participating in the Cooperative Documents Program -CODOC (as it is called). It covers the publications of the Canadian federal and provincial government; U.S. federal and state governments; the governments of France, Germany, U.S.S.R., England and the Commonwealth countries and the United Nations and its agencies, e.g. UNESCO and WHO. It also includes research and technical reports either issued by government agencies or sponsored through government grants. It is accessible through the on-line service CISTI and Canadian On-line Enquiry Service. It is accessible in Canada only.

Statistics Canada have what many consider to be the most sophisticated system of electronically disseminating information to clients(the Canadian public but more specifically to information brokers-companies- who compile and program the data and sell it to interested users) across the country. Many consider it an ideal system to be emulated by all government departments. It must be emphasized here that in alignment with overall government fiscal policy all information received by Canadians from government, whether paper or electronic, is based on a user-pay philosophy. The government do not recover their full costs.

Though heavily computerized with wide databases available to the public Statistics Canada take great care to protect the confidential information received from Canadians. Specific policies make it clear that all programmers and managers are to ensure that information obtained under the Statistics Act, the Corporation and Labour Unions Returns Act and the Income Tax Act, is to be protected from unauthorized access during electronic processing through the physical separation of their storage and processing from publicly accessible means of communication." Statistics Canada maintains three separate networks called Network A, Network B and Network C. Confidential data are processed and stored only on Network A and Network C. The three networks are separate and are not inter-connected by electronic communication networks."(3)Dial in and Dial out services are allowed on Network B, the network through which Canadians can access information and which is updated daily.

The system used for processing, storing and retrieving Statistics Canada data is called CANSIM: the Canadian Socio-Economic Information Management System. The CANSIM Time Series Data Base, "offers access to detailed and conceptually compatible sets of aggregate statistical data produced by Statistics Canada and a number of federal and provincial sources. Data on the Time Series Data Base currently pertain to the following subjects: system of national accounts, prices and price indexes, Labour(employment and income), Capital and finance, International trade and financial transactions, population, Agriculture and Food, Manufacturing, Mining and Forestry, Energy(supply and demand),Construction, Transportation, Domestic Merchandising and Services and Selected Statistics on Foreign Countries. "(4) CANSIM Time Series Data Base is offered through privately owned computer service bureaus such as I.P. Sharp and Associates Ltd., the Conference Board of Canada and Canada Systems Groups 2 and a host of other companies across Canada.

" The data items on the Time Series Data Base," says Statistics Canada in their promotional material explaining the system, " are stored as ` time series', with the full history of data available for each item or series. Time series of an homogeneous conceptual, methodological, and statistical nature are grouped together into larger aggregates called ` matrices'. This structural approach simplifies the identification and location of related series and facilitates access to the documentation pertaining to the series sought by users."(5)

The CANSIM MAIN BASE, ie the full base of over 400,000 time series, is offered exclusively through the CANSIM host service bureau. This base is updated daily. Release of new

data on the base coincides with the official announcement of availability. All other distributors of CANSIM time series obtain new data through retrieval from this base.

Statistics Canada's " Electronic Data Dissemination Division and its regional services offer data retrieval services to users who judge their data utilization to be too sporadic to justify the establishment of a user account with a distributor. Retrieval are done on a full cost-recovery basis. "(6) The data bases described above are just a few of the wide number of information bases available. There is a whole cross section of information in the series. The Time Series Data Base appeals ' to individuals who require regular access to data either in analyses of a recurrent nature, such as the monitoring of business conditions(prices, wages, production, sales profitability...), or in analyses that require an historical perspective, such as trend analyses, projections, or modelling of economic or business evolution." (7) The service also produces, apart from the data, charts and graphs.

Statistics Canada says that the system is successful and that " increasingly, small-business people and other data users are utilizing micro-computers and associated data analysis and charting software to analyze data obtained through data downloading facilities offered by many distributors or though special retrieval on diskettes by (our) personnel." (8)

The majority of government departments now appear to be on-line and individual departments have their own data bases which can be tapped into by employees. As so much personal information is now being introduced into the system, for example through the phone system in which messages are left in the system or personal information is exchanged between sections of a department, questions of privacy have arisen. One suggestion is that internal uses of personal information are going to have to result in changes to the Privacy Act. These are but one of the issues arising from the increasing computerization of government.

CANADA'S INFORMATION POLICY- GENERAL

Outside the United States , Canada has done more studies on the dissemination of Government Information than any other country. Two of the major works have been: The report of the Royal Commission on Government Organization(published in 1962 and usually known as the Glassco Commission,(after its chairman Mr. J. Grant Glassco) and the Task Force on Government Information-To Know and Be Known, 1969.(9) The result of both these studies

has been more centralization of government publishing and dissemination of information. Also, from the latter study came the birth of Information Canada. It is important to understand the birth, evolution and subsequent death of this organization to have some insight into the extent Canada has gone to develop a coherent and feasible national information policy.

INFORMATION CANADA-PROPAGANDA OR INFORMATION OUTLET?

This organization, established by the then Liberal Government of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau in 1970, set up a structure to disseminate information across the country in government run bookstores and inquiry centres as well as provide for the promotional, advertising and public relations needs of all government agencies. Prior to this information was disseminated by the Queen's Printer through departmental government channels and private bookstores and individual departments handled their own public relations programs. It is worth looking at the history of this institution in depth as an example of one institution having the power to control the policies of dissemination of information. In this instance, it led to disaster and could serve as a prototype for other governments who might be considering establishing similar organizations.

The goals and purposes of Information Canada were set down by the Prime Minister in a statement to the House of Commons on 10 February , 1970:

" First Information Canada will promote co-operation among federal information offices now operating in mutual isolation. The object will be to increase effectiveness as well as to save money by reducing duplication in the use of staff and equipment and by better joint use of the government's information resources. A similar approach was recommended by the Glassco Royal Commission on Government Organization. We expect that co-ordination will result in more coherent information, clearer and more understandable to Canadians than it has been in the past.

The second reason for establishing Information Canada is that there are many information offices in the federal government, but each now speaks for its own particular departmental concern.

The third reason is to be able to learn better the views of the Canadian people. The unit is therefore designed not merely as a vehicle for dissemination of information, but to provide better systems for Canadians to make known their viewpoints to their government. " (10)

Information Canada then became a central organization for the dissemination of information from all Canadian departments and agencies(similar in many ways to the United Kingdom's Office of Central Information) as well as a sounding board for Canadians to express their views. Specifically, the functions of the organization were to be discharged by:

" a. the design, provision and administration of exhibits and displays on behalf of Federal Government departments and agencies,

b. the provision of publishing services for departments except:

i. such publishing services as are already assigned by statute to the Queen's Printer,

ii. The publication of the Canada Gazette, the official documents and instruments required to be published therein, and the reports, transcripts, bills and other documents sent to the Queen's Printer for printing by the staff of the Senate and House of Commons of Canada,

c. the retail distribution system and bookstores associated, and to be associated therewith as formerly operated by the Queen's Printer,

d. the supervision and control of the rights and obligations in respect of the Crown Copyright in any document or other work of any kind in which it subsists,

e. the organization, management and direction of the staff and other resources acquired and to be acquired in respect of the administration of the consolidated information service." (11)

Information Canada, like Central Office of Information in the UK, offered a whole series of services, including research(on the types of publics and audiences needing the services), creative services, audio/visual services, exhibitions, publishing, sales and promotion and regional book sales. To the public eye, however, it appeared only as an outlet for the sale of government publications and promotion of their(the Liberals) works as a government and might account,partly, for its demise.

Information Canada was abruptly shut down in 1976 and seen as a failure by the Government and Opposition critics alike. The Government realized, amongst other things, that it was far too costly a venture(mainly the costs of running the bookstores in major centres across Canada). The costs far outweighed the sales of government publications bringing into question its viability and necessity.

Opposition critics in the House of Commons saw it as an outlet for party propaganda for the ruling Liberal Party. One of the major problems faced by Information Canada was its lack of ability to maintain its essential role of being the central disseminator of government information(a problem still not resolved to this day as no organization arose to take its place. Though the duties for the publishing and dissemination of government publications falls on the Department of Supply and Services,through their Canadian Government Publishing Centre, no central organization has arisen to replace Information Canada.)

Dissatisfaction by members of the Canadian Parliament with Information Canada became evident as early as 1973. One official, commenting on the perception that Information Canada was simply a government propaganda tool, made these observations before the Standing Committee on National Finance: " I think many of the officials of Information Canada would be inclined to agree that if we are not successful over a period of time- and it is still a relatively new agency- in accepting that it can be responsible to a minister as part of the government, and still establish a high degree of credibility in terms of being objective, then I still think some new structure will be necessary. To try to keep it the way it is is one of the reasons why there has been the preoccupation there has been by Information Canada to be sure that it is not a propaganda outlet for the government." (12)

These turned out to be prophetic words as this is precisely how Information Canada came to be perceived by many politicians. It is striking to contrast this with the UK Central Office of Information which served a similar function to Information Canada. The former has not had the problem of being perceived as a government propaganda outlet. Part of the answer might lie in the British civil service tradition of neutrality. Canadian civil servants are not always perceived as being neutral though they are required to be by the nature of their positions.

Another consideration is that in the time period of Information Canada the Liberal Party of Canada had become known as the ruling party of Canada because it had been in power most of the century, with the exception of a few years when the Progressive Conservative Party held office. This tended to lend a jaundiced eye to any organizations founded by a Liberal Government, especially one dealing with the dissemination of government information. Another reason might be because the government tried to use Information Canada as a means to determine what the public thought about

the government- which was perceived as a political mechanism working in favour of the government of the day.

The government statement released on 3 August , 1976, by the Minister of Supply and Services, made it clear the closure of Information Canada was for more than financial reasons. The justifications for closure offered by the Government were:

a. that government bookstores were not the best nor a cost-effective method of distributing government publications,

b. the policy to transfer to the private sector what could be more effectively done there. In this case the network of agents and the co-publishing policy would do the job more effectively than government bookstores,

c. that the salaries and high rents in the bookstores made it impossible to recover costs from sales, that it would cost almost $1 million a year to keep them open, and that to move to less central and expensive premises would defeat the object,

d. that sales in government bookstores accounted for only 20% of the total sales in government publications, and that the majority of these would be maintained through the mail order system, which would be expanded and improved."(13)

It is clear that the closing of Information Canada was not simply on economical grounds and that it was a combination of factors which brought about its untimely demise. Escalating costs, perception of the organization as a political tool, a lack of clear and distinct goals as to what Information Canada should accomplish, poor leadership and, possibly, public indifference, were just some of the problems leading to the demise of Information Canada.

SUPPLY AND SERVICES CANADA- THE NEW MAIN SUPPLIER

Functions formally covered by Information Canada were taken over by Supply and Services Canada under the Publishing Centre, which is a " Directorate aligned with the Print Procurement and Print Production functions under the control of the Directorate-General of Printing and Publishing, whose head is a professional printer."(14) The Publishing Centre, or the Government Information Publishing Centre as it is known under its full title, operates under a specific Treasury Board Directive.(15)(The latter is an organization similar to the Office of Management and Budget.)

Personnel and general support and managerial services are supplied from the main organization, and design services are located within the Printed Products Centre. The policy objective of the Publishing Centre is to assist the federal government in keeping the public informed of the policies, programs and services of government through the provision of a co-ordinated and effective publishing system. This system ensures that timely and efficiently marketed printed material of good and consistent quality, containing information of value to the economic, social or cultural welfare of Canadians, is made available to the public either through sale or free distribution. The policy and guidelines apply to all material, including microfiche and audio-visual, produced for or issued by a department of the information of the public. Excluded from this are mass media advertising and the normal press releases, speeches etc produced by departments for the use of new media.(16)

The policy objective gives the Publishing Centre broad responsibilities for publishing organization and distribution. Publishing is defined as the whole process of selecting or commissioning material, editing it, and arranging for its printing, its promotion, and distribution or sale. Also included is acceptance of all literary, artistic and professional responsibility for a publication.(17) The department is also responsible for copyright(as was Information Canada).

" The policy document(published by Treasury Board) contains a long list of detailed rules and responsibilities, among which the following are notable:

a. responsibilities are laid on departments for the administration of their publishing programs and the appointment of a departmental publications officer(usually the head of Information Services function) who shall in effect control the output and standards and liaise with the Publishing Centre. It is doubtful if this can be effective in the larger departments, particularly those with scientific and technical staff, where it is difficult for any one centre to establish complete publishing control.

b. paragraph 26 defines the responsibility of the Queen's Printer, an official of the Department of Supply and Services(a position since abolished and now replaced by Director, Canadian Government Publishing Centre)

c. paragraph 28 sets up an Inter-departmental Advisory Committee on Government Publishing, apparently to concern itself only with the policy and guidelines. The principal officers are the Director-General, Printing and Publishing, Supply and Services as Chairman; a Secretary provided by the

Publishing Centre, and ten members- five from specified departments; four from other publishing departments on a rotating basis annually and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee to the Council of Information Directors as a special member.

d. copyright applies to all Canadian Government publications both free and priced under Section 11 of the Copyright Act 1970." (18)

The Government Information Publishing Centre is responsible for the sale of all government publications. They do co-publishing with outside publishers, such as McMillan Publishers of Canada Ltd. and Fitzhenry/Whitside Ltd., but this is very small compared to their overall publishing. They are the publishers for the majority of books printed. When they go to an outside publisher(which is different from outside printers- see below) the Centre will buy back copies of the books from them. Government publications are also sold through private retailers such as Renouf Books Ltd. Since the closing of Information Canada in 1976, resulting in the closing down of its bookstores across the country, the purchase of government books by Canadians has become more difficult. One of the problems is private retailers will not always be willing to carry government publications which do not turn a profit.

In addition to sale of publications there are a substantial amount of free publications to selected lists by departments and agencies allowed under the Treasury Board Guidelines. These cover a wide range of recipients, including headquarters of political parties, provincial as well as federal oppositions, press and radio and a variety of unspecified educational, social or political organizations recommended by the Department of External Affairs and the National Librarian.

Free copies were sent in the past to these select mailing lists but with the implementation of fiscal restraints by the present government the amount being distributed has been significantly curtailed. The Canadian Government Information Publishing Centre now make available all the public research and background papers produced by the Library of Parliament. Though Reports of Parliamentary Committees can often be obtained free through members of Parliament the general policy now is the consumer pay for them.

With the election of the Conservative Government in 1984 new fiscal policies were enacted which included farming out as much as possible to the private sector. In the last fiscal year Canadian $150,000 million was spent on outside printers. This represents 70% of all government printing. It is the policy of this current government to widen the gap

even further and to give more to the private sector. The exact percentage which will be done by private contractors is not known at this time.

The main printing plant for the Government Information Publishing Centre is called the Canadian Government Printing Center. It is located in Hull, Quebec(across the river from Ottawa). That plant employs approximately 250 people but there are sideline plants across the country also doing printing which brings the total staff to about 800.

DEPOSITORY LIBRARY SYSTEM.

There is also a " Depository Library system in which full depositories are designated on the advice of the National Librarian and the Department of External Affairs. Selected depositories may pick free from the daily checklist within 30 days of its issue. After that they must pay for copies selected." (19) The libraries included in the system are quite extensive(more so, for example, than in the United Kingdom which restricts their circulation to four main universities and libraries.) In Canada, the depository system includes : the library of each provincial legislature; the library of each university and public libraries on what are known as the Grade 1 list(but not specified in the Treasury Board manual).Five copies go to the Library of Parliament and two copies to the National Library.

The Government Information Publishing Centre issue a weekly checklist for distribution to those on the depository library system. This checklist is sent to about 1400 depositories across Canada(and some outside of Canada). Of these 1400 there are sixty libraries which are classified as full depositories. They receive everything listed on the checklist(which contains an average of 100-150 publications per week). The list includes books, periodicals, reports in paper as well as microfiche. Shortly, diskettes will be sent out to the full depository libraries. The diskettes in question are being prepared by the Department of Employment and Immigration.

The rest of the libraries on the weekly mailing list pick and choose items as they see fit and order them from the publishing centre. An official with the Government Information Publishing Centre that about 400-500 libraries in this second category are quite active. The rest could be considered to be on the periphery. At this time it is estimated about 350 copies of each publication are distributed to the depository system in English and another 125 in French.(20)

Individual departments are responsible for the administration of their publishing programs by an officer known as the Departmental Publications Officer. This officer is responsible for departmental publishing , including all phases such as ensuring each ' publication is justified by departmental policy or programs.' This system ensures co-ordination of dissemination of department information as the Treasury Board manual specifies that: "In most departments and agencies3s, the Departmental Publications Officer will be the head of the Information Services function, or someone designated by him. " (21)

TRENDS AND ISSUES IN THE DEPOSITORY LIBRARY SYSTEM

The advent of electronic dissemination of government information is having an impact on the depository library system. An official with the Government Publishing Information Centre stated that in light of the new technologies products produced by the government is now coming out in different ways, ie CD-ROM and diskettes.

With the emergence of the philosophy of access to information the Government is now looking at different ways to make the information accessible to the Canadian public right across Canada not just in major centres. There are different methods being evolved to achieve this goal.

For example, one product published in the past in paper form could now come out as three or four products, i.e. as a book, loose-leaf binder, RAM, in a database or on a diskette.The purpose here is to make dissemination of the information they have easier to the depository library network. It is now sometimes easier to disseminate the information electronically and where possible methods to do this will be developed. An overriding factor in the implementation of any of these policies will be the cost factor. Despite the intention of the Government Information Publishing Centre to make information more available cost studies will have to be done as to the feasibility of introducing these new policies.

Another idea being discussed is the initiation of an awareness program to inform the Canadian public of the depository system and what is in it. This is an important issue as the Government has placed an emphasis on educating people about their access rights under the Access to Information Act. This philosophy is being extended to the dissemination of government publications. The people they want to educate about their programs are not the current users but those who would become new users. It is a partial solution to the problem of getting publications into the hands of Canadians, especially as retail outlets are limited and often not known about by the average consumer.

Another idea being explored is extending the government's reference service and linking it up with the libraries in the depository system. There is currently a program called Reference Canada. This is a service which operates in major Canadian cities and allows a citizen to call a toll-free number to ask questions about government programs. It is set up through Federal and Provincial agreements in association with private contractors. The Government Information Publishing Centre is contemplating linking up the phone number of Reference Canada to the Depository Library system so that when a person walks into a library with a question about government the librarian can immediately link the person up by phone to Reference Canada.

These are some of the main issues connected with printing and the depository library system under the Government Publishing Centre in the Department of Supply and Services. The advent of technological development coupled with a Government policy of educating people about their access rights is leading to new and innovative ways to get published government information out to the public.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Treasury Board plays a key role in monitoring and interpreting publishing policy and is the body responsible for co-ordinating information policies of the federal government. The manual also makes it clear that" the marketing objective to be achieved , within the constraints inherent in the government's responsibility to inform the public and to do so without engendering unfair competition with the private publishing sector, is to meet customer demand for publication as effectively and economically as feasible while maintaining a cost revenue balance."(22)

ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT- ANOTHER TOOL FOR DISSEMINATION?

Canada's Access to Information Act, passed by Parliament in 1982, became operational on July 1, 1983. It is considered a new tool for Canadians to gain access to government information held by departments and agencies. Though it had a slow start, with only a few hundred requests in the first year of operation, there have now been a total of 12,806 requests under the Act as of March 31, 1987.

The Act gives Canadian citizens or landed immigrants a statutory right of access to federal government information. There are 27 classes of exemption, ranging from national defence, law enforcement, trade secrets, economic information vital to the operations of government, information exchanged through federal-provincial agreement

between the provinces and the federal-government and from international organizations and other countries to personal information. Confidences of the Queen's Privy Council (Cabinet documents) are excluded from the Act. This means they cannot be accessed in any way nor can they be reviewed by the Information Commissioner(to whom complaints are laid in the event of a denial or violation of one of the principles of the Act) or the Federal Court(to whom appeals are made after a complaint is disposed by the Information Commissioner and the user(requestor) is not satisfied with the results.)

A government department has thirty days to reply to a request but this time limit can be extended in certain, extenuating circumstances, as laid out in the Act. A requestor may consult an Access register, published by Treasury Board of Canada, which lists all government programs, the data banks in which certain classes of information are held and the names and address of the access coordinators (the officials who handle requests under the Act) and how to apply for government information. The requestor is required to pay an initial fee of Can. $5 when applying for information(which covers the first five hours of search and review). Additional time to fulfill a request costs $10 an hour and photocopying fees are 20 cents per page.

An individual has the right to the documents in either official language, can peruse the documents on department premises if requested or have the information sent by mail. The Act requires that information reading rooms be set up by all major departments and agencies. These are now in place and allow an individual to go to a department in Ottawa and read information that is presently available.

The Act required a mandatory three year review by a Parliamentary Committee, which submitted their Report to Parliament in March, 1987. The Report stated that there is still a strong element of secrecy in Canada and that the Access to Information Act was not strong enough to overcome this barrier. The Committee made 108 recommendations to improve both the Access to Information Act(AIA) and the Privacy Act. These are two separate but companion pieces of legislation in Canada.

One of the recommendations made by the Committee was that Cabinet documents be brought under the purview of the Act but be subject to review on denial only by the Federal Court and not the Information Commissioner(who can only recommend and not direct after reviewing a complaint). The essence of this recommendation is based on the principle that Cabinet is responsible to Parliament and should not be subject to review by an officer of Parliament.(The

Information Commissioner is appointed by and responsible to Parliament.)

The Committee also recommended removing the mandatory (ie must) and discretionary exemptions(ie may do so) and making all exemptions subject to a discretion of the official in the department. They also recommended lowering the time frame for fulfilling the request to 20 days, lowering the fees for making requests(including waiving the $5 application fee) and abolishing the current Register(found in all libraries in Canada) and replacing it with a more streamlined and efficient publication easy for all Canadians to use. It also recommended that the Acts be subject to regular review by a Parliamentary Committee.(23)

The Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee had been optimistic that the Government would accept most of the recommendations to improve the Access to Information Act. This did not happen. In the Government Response to the Committee Report, tabled by the Minister of Justice, the Honorable Ray Hnatysyhn on October 15, 1987, the Government essentially opted to make administrative rather than substantive changes to the Act. The government declined to include Cabinet documents under the Act or to change the present system of exemptions. These were two main areas the Committee felt needed change in order to improve access under the Act.

The Government stated they will ensure that Canadians are educated about their rights under the Act and accepted the recommendation that the Information Commissioner have an increased role in carrying out this function. The Government will also improve the status of the access co-ordinators (the officials responsible for handling requests under the Access to Information Act.) Access co-ordinators will now be given consistently senior roles throughout government and have access to senior officials to facilitate the release of information. The government will ensure that senior officials throughout government are aware of the principles of the Act and of their duties. They will do this through educational programs,

The current mandatory $5 fee for making a request under the Access to Information Act will be dropped. The $5 fee allowed the requestor five free hours of search and preparation time but now will allow only two free hours. Some critics have suggested this could mean increased fees for access requests. The Government stated in their Response that fees collected under the Act in the period from July 1, 1983 to March 31, 1987 amounted to only $141,500 (for processing 12,000 requests) while actual operational costs were $34 million. They propose the following changes to the fee structure(based on the user-pay philosophy):

" the application fee will be eliminated;

free service for each request for search and preparation time or equivalent services within the zone or where it is not economical for the government to recover a fee. Otherwise fees will be assessed;

there will continue to be no charge for reviewing material for exemptions or for shipping; and

subject to the above, fees will be assessed on the basis of the real costs for processing requests."(24)

Some critics feel that costs for requests could rise substantially thus decreasing the ability of requestors to obtain government information under the Access to Information Act. The Government has also proposed that a section to the Act be added which would prohibit what they consider trivial or vexatious requests. This has caused a flurry of criticism with the majority view being expressed that this puts the government in a position to decide who shall or shall not receive information. If implemented this could mean a right now implicit in the Act would be removed.

The Government's response leads to the conclusion that the Access to Information Act will continue to be a limited tool to obtain government information and much information will continue to be withheld. The one positive element to the overall Government Response is the sensitivity to the need to educate Canadians about their access rights. This has led to attitudes of more openness with government and particularly with the Government Information Publishing Centre which is seeking ways to better disseminate their information.

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that though Canada has not a precise and clear national information policy at this time the Federal Government, through the Department of Communications, is working towards developing a cohesive policy for the electronic dissemination of information. The current method of publishing and disseminating information through Supply and Services Canada and individual departments and agencies is apparently working.

What is evident is that as the country becomes increasingly wired to data banks a central policy is going to be needed to coordinate the dissemination of electronic information. A failure to achieve this will only result in the pot pourri of a policy that now exists. Canada does not appear to have reached the level of the United States in

electronic dissemination and all indications are that many are waiting for the development of a US policy in this regard, with the view of possibly harmonizing any system developed in Canada.

Footnotes:

1. Interview by author with P. Trottier, Director, Access to Information and Privacy Office, Department of Regional and Industrial Expansion, Ottawa, August 1987.

2. Interviews by author with Eric Spicer, Chief Librarian, Library of Parliament and staff members Bruno Gnassi and Gilles Marleau, July, 1987

3. Statistics Canada, Policy on Electronic Communications Networks, June 5, 1986, pp1-2

4. Statistics Canada, Promotional Brochure, CANSIM, November , 1986, p. 1

5. IBID p. 1

6. IBID p.2

7. IBID p.2

8. IBID p.21

9. Cherns, J.J., Official Publishing: An Overview, p.67, Pergammon Press, Toronto, 1979.

10. IBID pp. 82-83

11. IBID pp.83-84

12. Proceedings of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance(Canada) , Issue no. 5, 1973.

13. Cherns, J.J., OP. Cit. p.101

14. IBID p.102

15. Treasury Board, Canada, Administrative Policy Manual, Chapter 335, PUBLISHING, December, 1978

16. Cherns, J.J. Op. Cit. p.103

17. IBID p.103

18. IBID p.105

19. IBID p.106

20. Conversations with Government Information Publishing Centre official, Department of Supply and Services, November 26, 1987.

21. OP. Cit. Treasury Board Manual.

22. IBID. p.18

23. " Open and Shut: Enhancing the Right to Know and the Right to Privacy." Report of the Standing Committee on Justice and the Solicitor-General on the Review of the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act

24. Access and Privacy: The Steps Ahead. Government of Canada, Department of Supply and Services, October, 1987 pp 43-44.

THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

INTRODUCTION

The Federal Republic of Germany(West Germany) has developed significant electronic information policies to better service both the public and private sectors. It has developed a " specialized information " program and has allocated considerable funds for its execution. The Federal Government recognizes the need to make specialized information, such as in the medical, agricultural, environmental, energy and industrial sectors(as a few examples) available to create information sources that will contribute to a healthy economic climate. They recognize the necessity of the government playing a role in the dissemination of specialized information in many forms, not least of which , today, is the electronic database. The government of the Federal Republic of Germany works in close conjunction with the European Economic Commission(the EC), and other international organizations, in achieving these goals. They are the most advanced of the European countries and deserve special attention first, because they have developed a workable policy and secondly, because they have developed a policy which is in alignment with what the OTA is attempting with their study.

The Federal Government's other methods of disseminating information are spotty but in some respects align with the systems developed in the UK and France. One major flaw in the dissemination of their government information(non-electronic) is there are no major retail outlets for the sale of government publications and the tendency is on distribution of free publications, by federal ministries, to those who get themselves on lists. In addition, the Government controls much of the information that is distributed from committees responsible to the Bundestag. However, their information output is prolific and it is worth examining their overall information policies as the Federal Republic of Germany, though far behind the United States in the means of electronic dissemination, have developed comprehensive manual and electronic information policies.

INFORMATION POLICIES

Information is disseminated through various mechanisms in West Germany. Departments are allowed to organize, write, publish and distribute(most of it free) their own materials. One Department of special interest is the Federal Centre for Political Education. This Department's particular purpose is to' foster by means of civic education understanding of political affairs, to imbue the individual with a more democratic outlook and to encourage him to engage in political activity.'(1) Part of this mandate includes widespread communication to different levels of the public. To achieve this, extensive use is made of films, videos, magazines and communications through the mass media. They publish a weekly newspaper Das Parliament which highlights events of the week in the Bundestag(parliament), current issues of interest to West Germany at home and abroad and interviews with politicians as well as reviewing books of political interest.(2)

PRESS AND INFORMATION OFFICE

The closest to a central office of information organization is the Press and Information Office, which operates under a State Secretary and is responsible to the Federal Chancellor. Its primary function is to keep the government of the day informed about news matters, conducting public opinion surveys, informing the public about what the government is doing, acting as spokesmen at press conferences(much like press briefings in the U.S.) and sometimes coordinating political activities between different Federal ministries when there is a common interest to do so.(3) There is no central publishing organization so the Press and Information Office only publishes information from other departments when they need material outside their particular fields of interest.

The proceedings of the Bundestag are published regularly as are legal orders and regulations, international treaties and a compendium of federal laws, in two official Gazettes.

However, the primary difficulty in finding information in West Germany is there is no central bookstore or official outlets through which the individual can purchase books or documents.(There is also no Freedom of Information Act and no prospects of one in the future.) Books are deposited in the national library but there are no enquiry centers like in Australia, a Documentation Francaise as in France or HMSO like in UK, which is easily accessible in major metropolitan areas.

Thus if an individual is searching for information then a certain amount of expertise is required, such as knowing where to look for the information. An average citizen wanting a simple piece of information is going to have a difficult time finding it.

Parliament(the Bundestag) is well served by both the Press and Information Office and a Parliamentary Information Centre,(which also publishes information daily about the activities of Parliament) along with the publication of Das Parliament. Through these vehicles a lot of information is getting out to the public via different media channels. However, concern has been raised that this lends itself to being a propaganda machine for the government of the day rather than outlets to inform people fully. However, one protection against full control of the dissemination of government information is the existence of the deposit law. This requires" deposit in the German National Library at Frankfurt, the West German library at Hamburg, the Parliamentary Library at Bonn and the Bavarian State Library at Munich," and as a result" more than 75%- probably up to 90% - of publications are reckoned to be recorded. A bibliography is published by the National Library about four years after the year of publication."(4)

Commenting on the West German system of releasing information J.J Cherns concluded in his 1979 study Official Publishing:

" A likely development would be eventually a more detached and coherent system of distribution to the public, possibly more through sale channels..... But the whole question of central control of official publishing is more than a question of mechanics in a country which has memories of the misuse of state propaganda, for which it no doubt does not wish to be seen providing a possible instrument."(5)

A lack of a central information policy up to the nineteen-seventies has possibly affected the development of their policy regarding the dissemination of specialized information through electronic databases. Political fears might go some way in explaining this but recent developments show the interest the Federal Government has in electronic databases. Also, as shown below, there has been far more concentration on specialized information. However, this too has a restricted public- the professional.

ELECTRONIC DISSEMINATION

" In the Federal Republic of Germany, as in other highly developed industrial nations, ever more people will be concerned with the production, distribution and processing of information in the transition to the information society. Technical developments will lead to information and communication systems which will make the external and internal information structures in scientific,economic and state organizations more closely inter-connectable. Electronic specialized information is an important part of these information and communication systems. "(6) SPECIALIZED INFORMATION PROGRAM OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.FEDERAL MINISTRY OF RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY.

The Federal government is very aware of its responsibilities in the area of specialized information and the necessity for this to be available to professionals, scientists, technicians, researchers, academics, corporate and business executives and all who need such information today. Their specialized information policy was set out in government policy statements in 1982 and 1983.

Much of the work is done in cooperation with the Landers (states). Specialized information , according to the program developed by the Federal Ministry of Research and Technology, documents science and research and " includes, in addition to (these findings), information about the economy and (what is) needed in the economic process(eg. money and credit information, enterprise and product information, foreign trade information.)"(7) It also includes information in the state (ie Federal Government and the Landers)(eg. statistics, healthy authorities, agriculture, the environment, labour and social affairs)(8).

THE SPECIALIZED INFORMATION PROGRAM

As a result of government concerns, a comprehensive information program was initiated in 1985 which is being implemented over a three year period. The thrust is to service the private sector while also making government databases available as needed. The program involves not only electronic dissemination of information from both the private and public sectors but other vehicles for distributing and making information easily and readily accessible. The program published by the Ministry of Research and Technology, describes the overall intent:

"In the Federal Republic of Germany, specialized information is provided in a multi-layered, traditionally efficient system. This includes above all:

. authors and editors employed in universities, academies, research institutions, specialized information institutions, enterprises, associations, social and state organizations, or such institutions themselves;

. specialized publishers and the specialized press which publish and distribute specialized information, as well as the specialized book trade(retail booksellers) which sells specialized information in an efficient and close commercial network;

. specialized information computing centres(SI computing centres) which make databases available for use;

. libraries which ensure access to specialized literature;

. information brokers."(9)

The program emphasizes that both the federal and state governments have concentrated in developing policies and giving support to such areas as: building up databases in the specialized information computing centres, funds for the distribution of the products produced by the technology, especially for science and technology, producing data and facts for selected user groups and securing access to specialized literature through libraries.(10)

It is acknowledged that the electronic database market in the Federal Republic of Germany is small compared to the United States but they do work in co-operation with the European Economic Commission(EC). Official statistics on actual usages are not available but it is clear one of the difficulties in developing large databases which will sell widely is due to the language, historical and national differences between the European countries. Though the databases may not be as large or as profitable as US databases this has not curtailed activity on the part of the government to assist in developing the whole specialized industry. The program also recognizes that access to government databases is as important as access to specialized information databases in the private sector.

In order to overcome the national barriers the program states the Federal Government " welcomes and supports the European Communities Commission's intention of creating a favourable commercial environment for the development of an electronic information market in Europe; to this end the Commission wishes to investigate the relationships between

public and private sectors, the legal questions(eg. copyright, tax law, liability law etc.) and international aspects in the member countries."(11)

THE INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTATION PROGRAM (I&D)

The Government set up an Information and Documentation(I and D) program as early as 1974 to develop long range scientific and information services(with specialized information centres and the appropriate infrastructure). As a result the Society for Information and Documentation (GID) was formed. The program lists twelve organizations in which " the I & D program has achieved the bringing together and continuation of largely uncoordinated information and documentation activities in(12) specialized information centres and information institutions in accordance with its goals."(12) These include such fields as medicine, food and agriculture, the sciences, regional planing, justice, social sciences, technology and the environment.

However, it must be stressed these are not all government centres but cover mostly the private sector as well as quasi non-governmental organizations such as the Medical Documentation and Information Centre(DIMDI) , and the legal information Centre JURIS. Within the framework of the I and D program, " the same material was built up and extended for electronic information distribution in the form of a total of about 60 predominantly scientific and technical databases, with related services."(13) Specialized information computing centres have been set up for accessing the databases. In addition, " telecommunications networks came into being such as the European Communities EURONET, the German Federal Post Office's DATEX-P and special networks such as DIMDINET, with which 17 information services,- mostly in university libraries- were linked up to DIMDI(the medical database) for the first time."(14)

The government has made it clear that their SI(specialized information) policy does not " aim to steer the structures of production and supply in the specialized information market in particular directions. Where support is given, this is decided by higher social or general economic reasons, since specialized information is either an area of fundamental research, a task for public services and Government provision for the future, or a high-risk expensive long-term goal which would place too great a demand on private enterprise. Support is based on the principle of subordination, ie. the subordination of state aid vis-a-vis private ventures, and must avoid impairing competition."(15)

The program makes clear the role of the private sector and the contribution from the public sector. The specialized information program is " a guideline of state activity to encourage private ventures in the market for electronically transmitted specialized information, too. An important prerequisite for this is trusting cooperation between specialized publishers, special information establishments and scientific libraries. It remains the basic aim of a free market economy realignment of specialized information policy to lead the state back to the core of its duties, to avoid new subsidies and to correct existing ones, if necessary."(16)

The clear message is that in the time of fiscal restraint as much as possible should be left to the private sector with the government contributing where necessary.

There are exceptions in the case of reference databases, which are predominantly unable to pay their way, and in the case of specialized information for science and research. In general, " the state has a special responsibility for offering sufficient information and services, which , as experience has shown, cannot be met by commercial enterprises. In this respect, state involvement in this area is an element of indirect support for science and research. Nevertheless, here, too, the databases degree of cost recovery, ie. the ratio of expenditure to income, should be improved."(17)

AIMS AND FUNDS

Following are the aims set down in the Specialized Information Program, 1985-1988, published by the Government (to be followed by a sample of some of the funds being allocated by the government.)

" *Within the framework of a realignment of its specialized information policy and its constitutional area of jurisdiction, the Federal Government pursues the following aims:*

. to improve the commercial environment of the specialized information market and- for example by means of deregulation and privatization- to overcome existing obstacles and bottlenecks;

. to strengthen transfer of information with science and between research and industry, particularly in order to intensify transfer of technology and encouragement of innovation, in state areas(parliament, administration and jurisdiction) as well as in practice(eg health care);

. to guarantee transborder data flow for specialized information also, and to create conditions which will allow the German supply of specialized information and demand to be extended and improved within the framework of an open trade system, thus enabling German suppliers of information- also using opportunities of European and worldwide cooperation- to strengthen their international position;

. to increase the use and acceptance of specialized information in science, industry, the media, the state and society and to improve access to international specialized information;

. to improve the German economy's market opportunities and to create future-oriented jobs in the information sector, too.

With this orientation of its specialized information policy, the Federal Government is aiming at a strict movement toward the user and his demands."(18)

ALLOCATION OF FUNDS

The commitment of the Government to this program is evident through a cursory review of funds allocated for different projects to achieve these aims. For example, in a three year period DM 405 million was allocated for production and distribution of reference services and reference databases. Because databases containing scientific and research information must be kept as up to date as possible it is important to invest the money. Foreign databases, due to certain barriers of language , historical and user interest, pay small attention to Germany. Therefore, the program concludes that as much attention as possible must be paid to ensuring the latest specialized information is on databases or that supplementary German databases are built up.(19)

For the supply of electronic specialized information the government put aside DM 122 million. The aim of this is to " support the step-by-step development of an information network for industry and applied research in cooperation with the Lander(state). Through this a large proportion of German and foreign databases, in addition to the various services of electronic specialized information, should be made available for users in science, industry, state and society for on-line use. This information system builds on the existing SI(specialized information) computing centres and public telecommunication networks and is open for participation and use on the same terms to all interested parties; commercial enterprises of the private sector will also participate."(20)

The Federal Government then put aside DM 304 million for the utilization of specialized information. The aim is to use many outlets over and above electronic databases though the latter is one of four measures earmarked for development. DM 106 million was also set aside for information science.(21) Funds have been earmarked for cooperation with such international organizations as OECD, UNESCO and WHO.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

In terms of international cooperation the Federal Government pursues the following goals, within the framework of its foreign, economic, research and technology policies:

" . *improving the conditions for a worldwide supply of German specialized information;*

. *securing access for German users to the specialized information worldwide;*

. *promoting international cooperation and division of labour in the production, supply and utilization of specialized information;*

. *strengthening international cooperation in research, development and education, especially in overcoming existing language barriers."(22)*

The government plans to seek to strengthen cooperation not only with the international organizations but with the industrialized nations such as Japan and the USA. They plan to do this by:

" . *carrying out joint research and development projects in the construction of information systems;*

. *developing an infrastructure for the utilization of specialized information, eg information mediation agencies;*

. *improving education and training in specialized information, and improving the exchange of scient.sts and experiences."* (23)

CONCLUSIONS

The Federal Republic of Germany, though not having developed a central policy for dissemination to the public as a whole has evolved(and continues to evolve) sound electronic dissemination policies. Criticism has been levied at the present system of disseminating so widely, and in so many channels, the proceedings of Parliament. The lack of a central information office has meant, to some extent, that the public at large is not served as well as they might be if government information was more accessible.

The system of distributing manual information has been criticized as being susceptible to government propaganda. There is, no doubt, a need for outlets in major cities, where government information can be purchased. The deposit library system is in existence and works. The National Library produces an extensive bibliography annually but this system still requires a certain amount of skill found usually in a professional. Free lists are widespread in all the Ministries, who produce and publish their own information to the public, but getting on the list requires communication with the department concerned or being placed on their list because one is a preferred client.

It could be argued that these systems work well in the Federal Republic of Germany, except for the existence of retail outlets. Successive governments have not established one central organization responsible for the production, publication and distribution of all information. With the move towards the centralization of automated databases a central organization is not needed and would avoid the potential for abuse. Lack of a central organization has,perhaps, not been developed for the historical reasons cited above- the fear of the state using the government information for the projection of propaganda. This raises the spectre of a controlled population being brought along, and manipulated, by a government which might not have the best intentions of the people at heart.

However, the Specialized Information program that has been developed by the government, with the heavy stress on utilization and accessibility of electronic databases, could mean that a central organization is not needed for dissemination purposes. While the Ministry of Research and Technology has developed and implemented the policy they are not responsible for all the departments concerned. Thus, there is an area of autonomy between departments and no one central, control point.

Their electronic information policy is the most progressive in Europe and second only to the United States. The Government is sensitive to the necessity to move into the information society and have taken steps to bring the Federal Republic of Germany up to par with other industrialized countries. The Government is aware of the need to exploit their specialized information banks as a major resource and to assist industry as a whole to help in stimulating the economy. To achieve this specialized information outlets have been developed(and include more than just electronic databases). Significant funding has been issued to the private sector, computing centres and government ministries, to achieve these aims.

Not only is information made available but steps are taken to educate the people of the existence of these specialized information sources and to make them accessible overall to the professionals who need them. Reference databases and crucial information on areas of health, such as toxic chemicals, are made available through heavy subsidization by the government. The Government has also developed a close working relationship with other European organizations, especially the EC and the OECD, and international organizations, such as UNESCO and Who. The reference sources are constantly being updated.

This awareness of the need to move into the information society has resulted in the development of progressive policies. However, despite the advances the Federal Republic of Germany is still a long way behind the United States(a fact acknowledged in their Specialized Information Program.) The trend in the Federal Republic of Germany is towards making government electronic databases widely available. Databases vital to the economy and the health of the nation are already accessible. Though the precise number of government databases accessible to the public is not known it is clear that the Government will move towards greater accessibility.

This puts them on a par with the United States, which is developing their information policies in an evolutionary stage, Australia, which is currently developing a national information policy and Canada which is in the process of conducting a series of studies on communication, part of which will include the electronic dissemination of information.

FOOTNOTES

1. Cherns, J.J., Official Publishing: An Overview, p.157, Pergammon Press, London, UK, 1979

2. IBID p.157

3. IBID p.158

4. IBID p.164

5. IBID p.165

6. Specialized Information: Program of the Federal Republic of Germany- 1985-1988, Federal Minister of Research and Technology, Public Relations Office, Bonn, West Germany, p.9.

7. IBID p.10

8. IBID p.10

9. IBID p.11

10. IBID p.11

11. IBID p.12

12. IBID p.13

13. IBID p.14

14. IBID p.14

15. IBID p.16

16. IBID p.16

17. IBID pp.16-17

18. IBID p.19

19. IBID p.21

20. IBID p.22

21. IBID p.23

22. IBID p.69

23. IBID p.69

UNITED KINGDOM

The UK has many different information outlets and is an interesting study due to its many contradictions such as being the first to appoint a Minister of Information Technology in Europe but concentrating on developing the private sector to better use information resources rather than develop electronic dissemination policies for the government.

One of the best organizations set up to produce, publish and disseminate government information is Her Majesty's Stationery Office(HMSO). It handles many functions. Hansard, is handled by Her Majesty's Stationery Office (who also are responsible for government copyright); the Central Office of Information handle advertissing, advice to departments on public relations, some publications on Britain and other technical advice; individual departments handle their public relations and some departments both handle their own public relations as well as do their own printing and publishing. Ministerial statements are handled by departmental public relation's staff or the Central Office of Information but when it is a political statement it is released by Party headquarters. The distinction is kept quite clear between the political and government functions as the British civil service is renowned for its policy of neutrality.

The United Kingdom is also a good study regarding its views of dissemination of information as it has what is called a ubiquitous Official Secrets Act. Section 2 essentially states that it is an offense for any civil servant(or person who has signed an oath under the Official Secrets Act) to release any information without the permission of a senior official. This means that, essentially , the release of information is tightly controlled and the Government of the day and the Civil Service determine what gets out to the public. It is this which has given Britain the mantle of being the most administratively secret government amongst the western democracies. Despite a strong campaign for the last few years calling for a Freedom of Information Act Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher has twice told the House of Commons that there is no need for such an Act in Britain as the Government already releases enough information.

Though this aspect of secrecy is only one piece in the openness jigsaw puzzle it is an important one as the attitude engendered filters all down through government. A government committed to such deep secrecy is not as concerned about getting full information out to the people. The question then becomes: To what extent does this attitude of secrecy effect the overall policies regarding the dissemination of government information- both manually and electronically?

THE OVERALL INFORMATION POLICY

HMSO- HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE

According to J.J. Cherns, author of Official Publishing: An Overview, and a former assistant Controller of HMSO, the official publishing system did not take effective shape until the early years of this century and that it had ' assumed substantially its modern form by the outbreak of the second world war.' (1) He says that " its main instrument is..(HMSO) a common service department centralizing services for the administration, including official printing and sale publishing."(2) Though HMSO bills itself as the official printer for the government in fact in 1978 it produced only 30% of all government works.

The reason for this is" departments have their own information staff, dealing with both press and public relations work and with administrative information in all its usual forms. Major departments(e.g. the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; the Department of the Environment) have substantial specialist staff and technical facilities for producing their information and publicity material. Apart from the usual ephemeral associated with the processes of administration, such major departments originate much free published booklet and pamphlet material, and some more substantial published work. They also deal with some of their own publications agreed with HMSO to be of specialized and limited interest, and inappropriate for sale through HMSO's machinery."(4)

HMSO is the mandatory publisher for sale of books in Great Britain and its publishing centre and central office is located in London but it has three other government publishing sources." The HMSO regional office for Scotland, published items of Scottish origin and interest emanating from the present limited Scottish administration. ..... A small Welsh administration centralized in the Welsh office in Cardif published occasional items of specifically Welsh interest through the Wales and the West Regional Office of HMSO in Cardif; the Belfast office of HMSO publishes as an agency service for the government of Northern Ireland,

though the functions of that Government are at present carried on by direct administration." (5) Each of these offices also publish the London, Edinburgh and Belfast Gazette with publishing control varying. The Controller of HMSO is " an ex- officio Editor of the London Gazette, which has been published regularly since 1665..... The Belfast Gazette came into being with the Partition of Ireland in 1921 and the Edinburgh Gazette is officially.. edited in Scotland, and dates from 1793."(6)

HMSO is a ' free standing ' department headed by a Controller who is directly answerable to Parliament for the expenditure of his department. Responsibility for the HMSO was up until 1972 to the Chancellor of the Exchequer(or a more junior Minister in the Treasury) but is now answerable to the Minister for the Civil Service.(7)

Much of the distribution and sale of government documents is done both through the HMSO bookstores in major centres but also through bookseller agents throughout Britain.(8) Cherns says that HMSO has actively promoted access to government publishing through the book trade "both by appointing a number of booksellers as official agents, and by trading with others in a businesslike way. Credit accounts are maintained for trade customers and commercial risks are taken, such as the occasional bankruptcy of a bookseller customer. Around 30% of HMSO's total turnover goes through the book trade, and about 2,000 booksellers do business with the department. Trade business developed originally out of agencies for the sale of factory forms, necessary to industrial concerns all over the country. Some of these still remain, but the business has long ago outstripped such specialized outlets."(8)

Another unique feature of HMSO is ' that it is the only Government Publishing organization known which has a formal and extensive network of agents and arrangements for sales of its publications overseas,' which stretch back to the 19th century.(9) There are various ways of disseminating the information abroad: ' through the British Information Services; by the supply of catalogues and order forms to overseas posts of other government departments; and through the appointment of bookseller agents overseas.'(10)

The use of the depository library system is, however, limited. " Statutory deposit of government publications in the United Kingdom is minimal. Under Section 15(1) and(2) of the Copyright Act, 1911, unrepealed in the new Copyright Act, 1956, only 6 depository libraries are specified- the British Museum(now British Library), the Bodleian at Oxford University, Cambridge University Library, the National Library of Scotland, the National Library of Wales, and Trinity College, Dublin- a remnant of more imperial days. These receive automatically a copy of every HMSO

publication." (11) University libraries used to get a 50% discount on the retail cost of HMSO publications but this was withdrawn in 1962 on the grounds universities were receiving grants from government.

As a result the UK has never developed the widespread deposition of government publications in academic libraries which is such a marked feature of the USA system. Libraries, apart from the depository libraries, says Cherns, have always had to pay for their requirements, and this inevitably imposes a degree of selection on them.(12)

HMSO has had a policy of charging for documents they produce which has assisted in recovering costs of the administration and operating costs. There is a firm policy of limited free distribution but individual departments can develop their own free distribution list according to their needs and wants.

In conclusion, it can be said that HMSO, which is also responsible for all copyright of the British government publications, serves a very valid function and has been diligent in efficiently getting government information to the public over the decades. As well, it is unique in its selling of British publication overseas through the use of foreign agents.

UK CENTRAL OFFICE OF INFORMATION (COI)

This office is essentially the coordinating arm of the government which disseminates parliamentary statutes and government information through helping the media better understand issues. The latter is a primary function with the secondary one being to service diplomatic posts abroad to disseminate British information.

Though they produce books, such as Britain Today, and other documents acting as a coordination unit for the media is their main purpose. " Government information services have, broadly, two main roles- to serve and supplement the news media in explaining legislation and other matters to the public in Britain, and to support the country's diplomatic and commercial aims abroad. "(14) The COI acts as a common service agency and provides publicity services to meet the home and overseas information requirements of government departments and other publicly funded organizations.

THE CENTRAL OFFICE OF INFORMATION- ITS STRUCTURE.

The organizational structure of COI communicates the essence of the office and its distinctiveness from public relations' offices in government departments. This is important to understand as the function of Public Relations's offices is to more than hand out press releases and act as a channel for news to the press. The purpose of a public relations department is to work at many levels to further the image of their department and the messages they want to communicate to particular publics. The COI's role is much more restricted than this.

At the official level the co-ordination of the COI is in the " hands of the Prime Minister's Chief Press Secretary. .....As press adviser to the Prime Minister, the Chief Press Secretary is concerned with the presentational implications of policy over a wide field. The Chief Press Secretary with a deputy and other staff in the Prime Minister's Office, have direct and constant contact with the parliamentary press through regular meetings with the Lobby correspondents and other day-to-day contacts; they form the accepted channel through which information about parliamentary business(statements, forthcoming legislation, important parliamentary answers and White Papers, for instance,) is conveyed to the media .

" A meeting of chief information officers of all the main departments and the Director General of the COI is held each week under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister's Chief Press Secretary. It considers day-to-day business, co-ordination of information, longer-term policy and issues of interest to the government information service as a whole."(15)

The overall purpose of the COI is to communicate important information issues of the Government of the day ranging from health issues(such as the recent intensive campaign to educate the British people about AIDS) and energy issues. The COI duty is to " explain to members of the public the effects of new laws or administrative measures; to make the public aware of their rights and responsibilities under social legislation; and to encourage the proper use of social and other public services."(16)

The functions also include developing campaigns for recruitment to the armed forces and civilian services (nurses, police and prison officers, for example). These campaigns can involve exhibitions, films, printed material and advertising. To achieve this the COI often works closely with the department concerned.(17)

Some of the publications offered for sale by the COI are: reference pamphlets, reference papers, diary of coming events; periodicals and display material(such as photoposters). They also offer many free publications such as: Economic Progress Report- a monthly bulletin reviewing the UK economy; Forum, a quarterly magazine covering social, political, economic, cultural, environmental and international issues(this is produced by the Council of Europe on behalf of its 21 member countries) and View, a magazine issued four times a year dealing with education issues and education/industry issues.

The other side of their function is to provide information overseas. To this end they must provide facts about Britain itself and explanation of British views of world affairs. There is a close coordination and contact between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office(FCO) and the COI to achieve these goals.

Most British High Commissions and Embassies have a designated information officer on their staff. These officers, who work in close collaboration with their political and commercial colleagues, advise other staff in the post on all questions of public relation; try to build up good relationships with the local news media; and may, to different degrees, undertake public speaking and broadcasting, issues bulletins, handle press inquiries and act as official spokesmen. They have at their disposal a flow of material provided by the COI in all media which is prepared in consultation with them and with the FCO and the British Overseas Trade Board in London.

Another agency to promote Britain overseas is the British Council. It has staff in over 80 countries and their task is to promote overseas " an enduring understanding and appreciation of Britain through cultural, educational and technical co-operation. "(18) However, this is broader than the dissemination of government information and its mandate is one of presenting a viable, effective image of Britain abroad.

The COI's expenditure in 1985-86 was UK pounds 67 million with over half of this allocated to overseas publicity undertaken for the FCO. They have a staff of 820. COI services include advertising, exhibitions and display services in the UK and overseas; films , video and audio-visual presentations; overseas press news and features services; radio services; photographic illustrations and displays; editorial and design services for all printed materials; translations; programmes for overseas visitors; courses in information studies; videotext; and research services for use in planning and evaluating government campaigns.(19)

THE CENTRAL OFFICE OF INFORMATION-DOES IT WORK?

Despite the above quoted propaganda from the office of the COI itself a recent article in The Sunday Times suggested that the COI itself was in disarray and that one public relations official who called to request a video be made for his department was told to have it done outside as it would be faster.(20) Part of the problem of assessing the effectiveness of COI itself is that it has limited accountability and is not subject to outside scrutiny or sufficient oversight. Though it has been effective in some of its public relations and educational programs some critics feel it is in need of a serious revamping.

ACCESS TO PUBLIC RECORDS

There is a limited access to government records in Britain through the Public Records Act(1958, 1967) which requires that all records after a certain period be sent to the Public Records Office(PRO). Under the rules documents can be released after thirty years with certain exceptions (dealing mostly with security, national defence and personal information- much like most freedom of information Acts.) Under the thirty year rule citizens are allowed access and much of the information becomes available. Many of the records available include Cabinet minutes. Interestingly enough this does represent a good opportunity for access to government information, albeit thirty years later.

Michael Roper, an official with the Public Record Office, says that " public records in the PRO over 30 years old which are not open to public inspection constitute no more than about 1% of its total holdings of 447,000 shelf feet(85 miles)."(21) Roper observes that the Public Records Act is seen as a surrogate freedom of information act but he says it is not. " The main purposes of public records legislation are to ensure the selection of public records which ought to be permanently preserved, to safeguard those records for posterity and to make them available to public inspection."(22)

He concludes that " the concept of freedom of information should stand or fall on its own merits. It should not distort the wider purposes of public records legislation."(23) However, though the Public Records Act is not a piece of FOI legislation it is, nonetheless, one means of the public gaining access over and beyond that which is prepared by the Government for release. It does act as one avenue of openness for mostly the media who see this piece of legislation as one weapon in fighting government secrecy. The Times of London for years would run a series of articles about past Cabinets in the 1950's once the papers became available in the PRO. They are also invaluable to historians and researchers.

ELECTRONIC DISSEMINATION- ANY POLICY?

The extensive secrecy rampant throughout the British public service permeates the attitudes of all those who serve to help the public. The lack of willingness to communicate information to the public, based on the attitude of : " Why Should we Tell You?" cannot but serve to effect the overall policy of disseminating government information to the public. An unwillingness to communicate only that which is deemed official by senior management and the politicians has affected the responses of those in the lower echelons of the public service whose duty it is to impart information. One public relation's official for a large government department made it clear that any attempts to release information beyond the guidelines set by a senior department official, even if innocuous, can lead to severe reprimand and possible damage to one's career.(24)

It is therefore not surprising that the British endeavour in developing the benefits of information technology to British society has not extended to policies in disseminating information electronically. Britain was the first country to name a Minister of Information Technology when Mrs. Thatcher's Conservative Party came to power in 1979. Subsequent Committees on information technology have concentrated on utilization and development of the hardware and software in the private sector and the impact this will have on British society for the future. 1982 was Information Technology year in Britain in which events were held throughout the country, ranging from exhibitions to seminars and major conferences, to educate the people about the importance of Britain transferring to an Information Society.

Though the British have been extremely progressive in stressing the importance of information technology, and have been a leading country in the vanguard of the move to the information society, they have, nonetheless, failed to harness the technology to better give access to public information to the people.

ONLINE DATA BASES

This is not to say that there are not on-line data bases available to the British public and internationally to consumers from other countries. The Central Office of Statistics has a system , called CSO, which is available to the public by subscription available on a per use basis. This system is available through different companies, such as Chase Econometrics and I.P. Sharp Associates of Toronto as well as being linked up to the EUROPE SATELLITE DATA BANKS.

The database " contains about 14,000 monthly, quarterly, and annual time series related to economics in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Monthly and quarterly series are available with seasonal adjustments. Data are compiled from various sources by the UK Civil Service and correspond to data included in such Central Office of Statistics publications as Economic Trends, Financial Statistics, and Monthly Digest of Statistics. The major division of the file are: main economic indicators, national accounts, balance of payments, index of production and cyclical indicators, commodity flow accounts, employment and earnings, producer and retail price indexes, and financial statistics."(25) It is updated monthly with major revisions occurring annually.

Another major database is Polis. It is a comprehensive bibliographic databank that furnishes references and citations for all current events relating to the English House of Commons. Among the areas covered by POLIS are the status of various bills and other legislation in Parliament; papers and speeches delivered to the Commons; questions for debate in the Commons; proceedings of Parliament; domestic and foreign publications that refer to or are otherwise of interest to Parliament and its members; comments from newspapers, magazines and television regarding Parliament and legislation; and various other books and publications in the library of the House of Commons. Each record in the base gives the title of the publication or article referred to, the date it was published, the names of any members of Parliament or government bodies referred to in the piece, and keywords to cross-index.

Access is available through Scicon Computer Services in London. Virtually any significant information that a user might seek regarding the English House of Commons will be available through POLIS. From pending legislation to comment in the press, everything printed that mentions the lower house of Parliament will have a reference here.

DATA PROTECTION ACT- A MEANS OF DISSEMINATION?

The English Parliament passed a Data Protection Act in 1983. This statute allows individuals access to information on them, with certain restrictions, kept in automated data bases in both the public and private sectors. It is mentioned here as a query to an information officer at the British consulate in Toronto regarding electronic dissemination policies of the British government led to the answer that the Data Protection Act was the instrument for such policy.

In fact it is not as it deals solely with personal information and is in fact akin to the U.S.Privacy Act but is much more extensive as it covers automated databases in the private sector. Individuals have their personal information protected under this law and have rights of access but only to their own personal information.

The existence of a data protection act and the rights of privacy it imposes(in regards to information in automated data banks only) has not meant the development of any new government information policy. The same must be said of all other eight European countries which have such laws (including West Germany and France, embodied in this study.) The officials responsible for administering these laws have confined their interests to the narrow range of personal information and have not looked at this in the wider picture of dissemination of government information. The only exception has been when it appeared there could be a conflict between protecting personal information and allowing access to aggregate government information(ie like the FOIA). This debate has been short-lived, partly because access laws are not as widely used or as important as they are in North America(with the exception of France).

Even with France the two bodies which oversee the Freedom of Information Act and the Data Protection Act respectively, have nothing to do with each other. The data protection acts are not major policy instruments to be considered when analyzing overall government information policies. In Europe, they are perceived as quite two separate issues.

CONCLUSIONS

The presence of both these electronic systems and the current methods of disseminating information through HMSO and the Central Office of Information indicates that Britain is in a good position to move up to the level of at least Canada in the near future in disseminating information electronically.

However, years of administrative secrecy and a set way of doing things(an attitude integral to British culture and society as a whole which makes change difficult) means that Britain could be a long way from having systems in place throughout the government which could facilitate easy access by the public to the streams of government information being produced daily.

FOOTNOTES

1. Cherns, J.J., Official Publishing: An Overview, Pergammon Press, London, 1979 p.243

2. IBID p.243

3. IBID p.271

4. IBID pp 243-244

5. IBID p.244

6. IBID p. 245

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8. IBID p. 254

9. IBID p. 255

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11. IBID p. 257

12. IBID p. 257

13. IBID p.270

14. British Government Services, P.1, Reference Services, Central Office of Information, London, UK, February, 1987

15. IBID p.2

16. IBID p.3

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18. IBID p.7

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20. The Sunday Times, p.61, June 28,1987, London, UK

21. Roper, Michael, " Access to Public Records," p.88, paper in "Open Government ", Edited by Richard A. Chapman and Michael Hunt, Croom Helm, London, 1987.

22. IBID p.89

23. IBID p.91

24. Conversation by author with Public Relations official with Government Department, London, UK

25. Directory of Online Databases, Vol. 8., no. 2

FRANCE

INTRODUCTION

One feature that stands out when studying the systems used to disseminate information to the public, in France, is that there is no central or co-ordinated system for accomplishing this purpose. France has different institutions set up to print, publish and disseminate information such as the Documentation Francaise(the most well known), the Imprimirie Nationale(printer and publisher), the Service d'Information et de Diffusion(SID) a commission to protect information being released to the public and the Commission on Access by the Public to Administrative Documents. The latter is the body responsible for France's Freedom of Information Act(modeled on the US FOIA).

Though numerous studies have been done over the years there is still no single, co-ordinated body directing the flow of information to the public nor are there easily accessible centres around the country through which the public can purchase documents. There are government databases but no clear indications of a cohesive policy regarding disseminating information electronically. It is clear that France is looking to develop further in this direction but how far is another question.

INFORMATION INSTITUTIONS

According to J.J. Cherns in " Official Publishing","departments of State have their own information staff, the Minister's cabinet usually containing those concerned with press and public relations. The major departments are substantial publishers with their own official Bulletins."(1) One unique feature in France is the lack of inquiry centres, where people can make queries about government programs and published information, which is surprising as since the war years France has conducted many studies and implemented many changes to improve their information systems. It is apparent that they decided not to take the route of either Great Britain or Canada in developing policies to reach wide parts of the populace. Both of the latter developed extensive systems for selling government information to the public in conjunction with other means of dissemination.

It has often been pointed out that a single failure in France's information distribution methods is there is no single co-ordination " between departments, (and) there is often no publishing or co-ordination control within departments. Many documents are distributed only by the parent department- often as much free as by sale; other departments have satellite bodies distributing their publications through various networks; official statistical and scientific publications have their own well-developed departmental arrangements, often publishing through a variety of non-departmental bodies." (2) This points out the confusion and lack of cohesion concerning information policies.

There is one small central information organization , located within the Prime Minister's Office, called the Service d'Information et de Diffusion. Their major task is dealing with the day-to-day immediacies of public information, largely at the official level. It was created in February, 1976 and is formally charged with:

"a. undertaking information tasks of an interministerial kind,

b. giving technical assistance to public departments, and in suitable cases co-ordinating their actions,

c. distributing information to elected persons and bodies and to the press about the actions of the public administration,

d. co-ordinating or undertaking studies and surveys of opinion on the interministerial plan(Le Plan is the mainspring of French administrative actions) " (3)

It has a dual function of informing both the administration and the public. " It works in several media, and its essential job is to see that accurate information reaches the right people promptly..... Its most important spheres are:

a. the information of the government and of the Prefets(who.... are the chief administrative representatives of governments in the departments.)

b. the information of users of government services.

c. the distribution of other information publications in three notable forms: i) current information circulated in note form; information circulated in the official texts which are of national importance and interest and working papers for the press and parliamentarians, to give a better understanding of major projects and important government actions;

d. advice and assistance to departments about publicity campaigns and the control of TV publicity campaigns requested by departments;

e. analyses and studies of opinion."(4)

Another function they have is to do twice-daily briefings to the Prime Minister and other government officials on what the radio, tv and press are saying.

This is the only central information organization according to J.J.Cherns in his study published in 1979. More recent research does not indicate any central organization has developed which co-ordinates all government information. The Commission on Access to Government Documents(CADA) is a centralized body only in the sense that it has administrative functions with the different departments in regards to its duties under the Freedom of Information Act as well as handling complaints from citizens. But it cannot be perceived, in the much wider sense, as a central organizing body responsible for disseminating public information.

LE DOCUMENTATION FRANCAISE

There is one organization, also located under the Prime Minister's Office, which does fulfill the role, in a limited way, of a central government publishing organization. It is called La Documentation Francaise and it " fulfills the roles of a central publishing organization within a limited range of interest, and of a reference(though not a day-to-day) information organization."(5) The Documentation Francaise has bookstores in Paris and in other limited parts of France but is not considered a national distribution outlet for French publications.

Documentation Francaise was formed in 1950 with three basic purposes: 1) bringing together, to put at the disposition of the administration and the public, general documentation on the main current problems of France and the outside world; 2) publishing and distributing general and popularized works of information and 3) bringing about, in the course of these activities, interministerial co-ordination both in the field of documentation and in the publication and distribution of documents of general interest in public administration."(6)

Cherns, a former Assistant Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Organization(HMSO) in the UK, who did an extensive study of the French system, thinks that the Documentation Francaise is unique in the execution of its duties.

" The progress of the organization since (1950) is based on perhaps the most original conception of any governmental publishing organization, imaginatively conceived and purposefully executed. It could rightly claim..... that if some of its activities in publishing and photography bore a resemblance to the British Central Office of Information, its functions in documentation and research could be compared only with those of the Legislative Documentation Service of the American Library of Congress. In fact its functions and the way in which it carries them out make it unique."(7)

There is another organization which publishes the legislative and regulatory texts, collections of legal and specialized texts,reprinted from other official bulletins from a number of ministries. It is called the La Direction des Journaux Officiels and is also attached to the Prime Minister's Office. It also prints and distributes the official debates of both the Assembly and the Senate plus other Senate documents. The debates of the Senate and Assembly are published overnight, similar to Hansard in the UK and Canada and the Congressional Record in the U.S. The Journaux are sold at the Documentation Francaise bookstore in the Quai Voltaire in Paris as well as through the Imprimirie Nationale outlets(the national French publisher). Domestic papers of the National Assembly are printed by a private organization.(8)

Like other countries individual departments do their own publishing and dissemination of information they print. They make their own decisions about what to publish and very few even have legal obligations to produce annual reports to the National Assembly. The biggest publishers of information are: The National Centre for Scientific Research, the Ministry of Education, the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, the National Museums and a variety of state institutions such as the National Centre for Overseas Trade and the National Geographic Institute. Many departments also subsidize private Associations to produce and distribute what are virtually government documents. This was done under an Act passed in 1901. It has been estimated that because of this system only about 47% of government produced documents are sold while the rest are distributed free.(9) Another difficulty in getting documents distributed widely is that there are few administrative documents centres outside Paris. In many respects this reflects an elitist attitude in which information is readily available to the intellectual at the core of French society but largely unaccessible to those outside the system. Passage and implementation of the Freedom of Information Act(1978) is helping to change this attitude.

The Documentation Francaise is the major organ/institution distributing information in France. Its purpose is stated as being :" A service of the State, the Direction of the (institution) must reflect neither individual nor corporate interests, nor must it be an instrument of propaganda. It makes a constant effort at impartiality."(10)

The Documentation Francaise has many similarities to the HMSO in the UK with the exception that the Documentation Centre has a much narrower mandate in terms of what it sells.. The Institute maintains:

" a. an official bookshop displaying and selling under the Documentation Francaise imprint its own publications and those of departments within the sphere of the Prime Minister's Office, together with those of other departments attracted by its developing influence.

b. a library open to all and comprising more than 130,000 volumes specializing in contemporary political, economic and social questions.(It also maintains publications from overseas countries, publications of international organizations and an index for easy access).

c.specialized documentation centres, constantly maintaining thousands of dossiers by daily filing of press cuttings from domestic and foreign sources, supplementing the permanent works in the library.

d. a photographic collection, equally open to the public, comprising over 100,000 photos in black and white and colour on various aspects of present day France and on contemporary French personalities and a historical section. 3,000 colour slides and 80,000 photographs on French-speaking Africa complete the collection. " (11)

Documentation Francaise, it is believed by many, is not in a position to be able to reach a broad, indeterminate public but believes it does a good job in disseminating information to a crucial public who are in need of the documents they produce.

According to Cherns, the Documentation Francaise, has become " an important centre of political, economic and social documentation, a major service in political studies and economic analysis, and one of the principal French organisms in State publishing. It has the essential task through its dossiers and its publications of aiding in their task those who have the responsibility for public decisions, making at the same time a contribution to help citizens in forming their own opinions in knowledge of the facts." (12)

Over a period of years different Commissions have studied the French information system and made recommendations resulting in today's policies including : the FOI Act enshrining a right to know for the average citizen; increased Documentation Francaise centres across France; the setting up of a Commission responsible for protecting the communication of administrative documents to the public(set up in 1977) and workshops and seminars addressing information questions. All these actions have helped to improve French information dissemination policies.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Many consider the implementation of the FOIA in 1978 as the barrier lowered to administrative secrecy which has brought about a broader and more liberal view by public servants regarding the public right to administrative documents. Release of documents in this sphere has meant a loosening of attitudes in other areas, such as with the Documentation Francaise, and more ways devised to impart information to the public. The FOIA is considered to be working very well in France with a lot of information getting out to the public(though the normal barriers exists, such as using the exemptions to prevent the release of embarrassing information.)

Cherns claims that all these changes led to a situation for good change. " Thus, " he writes, " the administrative machinery had been created and the machinery set for a notable change in the attitude and practice of French administration in the provision of public information. The processes, and some of the situations are peculiarly French, but the intentions are clear."(13)

WHO GETS THE INFORMATION- IS IT ENOUGH?

This is an important question to ponder. As stressed above, though the Documentation Francaise and the Service de l"information et Diffusion have been well organized and are set up to provide a wide range of information services, keeping their publics briefed, the negative part of these organizations is the failure to disseminate information to wide numbers of French citizens. Their information systems seem to be geared more for the privileged few than the many though, in all fairness, it must be stressed that sending information out on a broad basis has be thwarted through logistical problems. One of these, is the tendency of organizations, such as those under the Prime Minister's Office and larger departments, to operate independently of others.

The paramount problem facing the formation of a central institution to disseminate information is to overcome not only departmental prejudices(and the willingness to co-operate with others) but the formation of a super agency which would take too much power unto itself and turn into an " Information Czar ". This is the same argument posited in the Australian section and fits well for all countries.

The challenge to information policy makers today is to develop coherent and cohesive policies that will allow citizens the widest access to all manner of public information while at the same time not developing powers that could be open to abuse. This could be a goal for France. But, in many respects, the fact France does not have one binding institution coordinating all government information and its release to the public could well work in its favour. There are two sides to this argument and both need extensive debate and study.

ELECTRONIC DISSEMINATION.

The capacity to store and disseminate information electronically is being used in France as well as other western countries. It is evident, from the study done by this author, that France has not accomplished anything near what the United States or Canada have done to date. An exhaustive on-line and documents search of directories of existing databases by a research firm(14) turned up only one government database for France which disseminates information to the public.(15)

According to the write up on the system BIPA is supplied by the Documentation Francaise. It consists of references to speeches and documents concerning politics and government in France. Among the areas covered are official ministerial reports, memoranda and communiques from meetings of the French cabinet; speeches of the presidents of the Republic of France since 1974, and of all important French political leaders from 1979 to the present; a chronology of French domestic and foreign policy and related political events from 1974 to date; more general political press clippings from 1980 to the present; and various periodicals and the publications for the Documentation Francaise from 1970 to date. Approximately 25,000 new records are added to the base each year, with updates varying by file from weekly to bi-monthly. The base is available only in French and it is accessed, for a fee, through Telysystemes-Questel, Paris, France.

It is not surprising that a search would produce only this one database produced by Documentation Francaise. As noted above this fits in with the general, overall information policies developed by the French government. There are numerous databases within French government departments but these are not accessible to the public. Interviews with an information officer at the French consulate in Toronto did not produce any information as to the precise nature of France information policy in regard to electronic dissemination. There appears to be no clear cut policy at the moment though there has been much public discussion.

It must also be kept in mind that France is a member country of the European Economic Community(EC) and that the EC have many information databases which are available to the public at large through different on-line systems.(See below under chapter EC for more data on this.) France is a major contributor to those databases(see below under EC for descriptions).

Thus in many respects much government information is being released to the general public but through an agency

other than the French government. It is possible this has been one influence in preventing the dissemination of government information within France itself as the EC databases provide not only information from France but from many other of the member countries. Users, when researching out information from EC, would find comparative information on countries quite useful. Use of a system which contained information from many countries is far more useful to a corporation (or researcher - public or private- for that matter) than access to databases from one country.

Despite this, neither France or the EC are near the capacity of the US government when it comes to disseminating government information electronically. The research company which did many of the on-line searches in relation to this study emphasized that the United States is far and above ahead of any other country or international organization in respect of the dissemination of electronic information.

CONCLUSIONS

It is self-evident that the direction France has taken in developing their current dissemination of government information policies has not lent itself to an easy transition to electronic systems. The rigidity of the French system has resulted in slow movement towards a wider and more sophisticated system of electronic dissemination of government information. The existence of the EC database systems significantly contributes, though, in making information on France widely available throughout Europe and in the U.S.

FOOTNOTES

1. Cherns, J.J., Official Publishing: An Overview, Pergammon Press, London, UK., 1979, p.125

2. IBID p.125

3. IBID p.125

4. IBID pp.129-130

5. IBID p. 124

6. IBID p.126

7. IBID p.126

8. IBID p.127

9. IBID p.128

10. IBID p.132

11. IBID pp.132-133

12. IBID p. 135

13. IBID p. 144

14. Result of research by Standard Information and Research Systems, Toronto, Canada, August, 1987.

15. The Omni Directory of Data Bases, Published by Omni Magazine, USA.

AUSTRALIA

INTRODUCTION

Australia is comprised of six states and is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations with the Queen as its head. It has a bi-cameral Parliament, comprised of House of Representatives and a Senate, both elected. The Commonwealth of Australia is a federation not created until 1901. The current national capital is Canberra, a city created for that purpose after the capital was moved from Melbourne. Because of the lateness in becoming a nation a coherent, national publishing and information policy was not developed for decades. However, despite the lateness in developing a paper information policy the Australia government has a deep sensitivity to the need to not only move into the Information Age but to stay abreast of developments.

INFORMATION AND PUBLISHING POLICY- GENERAL

Though a Publications Committee was set up in 1928 it was ineffective(having members only from the Treasury Department, the Office of the Prime Minister and Public Service Board) and it was not until the formation of a Joint Parliamentary Printing Committee in 1962 did a cohesive means of disseminating government information to the public start to emerge. Up until this point publishing and dissemination was a state function. Comprehensive systems and policies existed at those levels and the Federal Government had essentially relied upon them. (1) Australia is now in the process of developing a national information policy(see below).

Hansard is published by Parliament recording the daily debates in the House and Senate as well as Committee hearings. However, for years the policy of selling and distributing Hansard was in disarray and it is only in recent years it has become more widely accessible to the public at large.

In 1962 the Printing Committee made the following statement to the Treasurer outlining the fundamental flaws in the Australian publishing and information policy:

" No single office is responsible for publishing all Commonwealth documents, for establishing some uniformity in printing styles, standards and the manner in which copy should be prepared, and for curbing unnecessary extravagance where that takes place.

No single office can supply copies of all Commonwealth publications.

Arrangements for advising the potential user of Commonwealth publications as to (a) what is available and (b) how to obtain them, are so inadequate as to be practically non-existent

Little is done to have Commonwealth publications available for would be readers in the capital cities

As each Department is responsible for the issue of its own publications, widely differing methods in the distribution of publications occur

The difficulty experienced by the Government Printer in coping with the quantity of work asked of him after the close of each financial year." (2)

As one author succinctly pointed out this, " in practice, had meant that departments were their own publishers, prints had been regulated by ' target groups' or lack of funds, rather than by any estimates of potential demand, particularly for free publications; even such important papers as the Budget papers were often difficult to purchase." (3) The Joint Committee subsequently produced a Report, in 1963, which became the foundation of the present Australian Government Publishing Service(AGPS).The Report relied heavily on the findings of the Canadian Glassco Commission and adopted many of Canada's practices.

The Committee followed the basic dictum set out in the Glassco Commission Report: " Simply to print does not guarantee that it will be read. The true demand for a publication will not be realized unless the style attracts attention, potential readers know of its existence, and copies are made conveniently available. Without the publisher, the author may have limited success."(4)

The Committee recommended the formation of Government information centres and bookstores in the capital cities of the Australian states and these were accepted by the Government of the day. The Committee made the crucial point that for such Commonwealth bookstores to be successful they must be as close to the heart of the city as possible and to be seen by people ' in business and industry, shoppers and visitors from the country and overseas. They need to be arranged attractively and conducted efficiently. They must receive their stocks of publications without delay.'(5) It was, additionally, important to ensure the information was disseminated because of the thousands upon thousands of dollars spent on the printing and publishing of government documents.

GOVERNMENT INQUIRY CENTRES: A WORKABLE SYSTEM

There are currently Commonvealth Inquiry Centres in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide. The Australian Government Publishing Service,(AGPS) which runs the Centres, comes under the Department of Administrative Services.

In search for a comprehensive dissemination policy the Commonwealth government has been involved in a helter skelter approach ranging from the lack of any consistent, national policy in the first sixty years to an evolving policy which included the AGPS being under a Department of the Media(1972-75 and now defunct) and the Australian Information Service and the Australian Government Liaison Service(formed to better inform Australians about the activities of their Government and programs available to them- also under the defunct Department of Media.) What is finally emerging is standard methods to disseminate information through the AGPS.

During the existence of the Department of the Media the functions of printing, publishing and disseminating government information had been split up between the Australian Government Printing Service, the Australian Information Office and the Australian Government Liaison Service. The disbanding of the Department of the Media gave the AGPS the necessary control it needed to properly function as a publisher as well as run the Inquiry Centres (which not only sold books but answered queries on the phone from citizens about government services and publications.)

The responsibilities of the AGPS were defined by the Government, when it was set up on July 1, 1970, as:

a. producing and distributing all Government publications,

b. determining the style and format of all publicationsexcept those of a 'persuasive ' nature designed by the then Australian News and Information bureau,

c. deciding saleability, prints and prices,

d. arranging printing of all publications, internally or elsewhere, and controlling production standards,

e. selling and distributing all Australian government publications, subject only to departmental control of free issues to target groups." (6)

The AGPS is not the universal publisher in Australia that it wants to be as the Bureaus of Statistics(set out by separate legislation) has the mandate to print and publish its own publications. Though the AGPS publish a few of the documents of the Bureau of Statistics they still retain the imprint of the latter bureau.

Apart from the Bureau of Statistics the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization(CSIRO) is a separate organization that disseminates its own information. It is the sole disseminator of scientific information in Australia. Its information activities date back to 1916 and the founding Acts of its precursors (Institute of Science and Industry Act 1920, Science and Industry Research Act 1920-26 and the Science and Industry Research Act, 1949, establishing the CSIRO.) The latter act gave it a statutory responsibility for the ' collection and dissemination of information relating to scientific and technical matters and the publication of scientific and technical papers.' (7) The CSIRO is an independent agency and runs its own printing, publishing, sales and distribution organization, which publishes the main Australian Scientific Journals, with an effective system of screening papers submitted.

It runs library , information , inquiry and referral services for which small charges are made. Prior to 1974 most material was distributed free but this has since changed and information and services are delivered on a cost recovery basis. (8)

There is the usual widespread ' distribution of free pamphlets, folders, brochures, etc. by individual departments.' (9) Each department has a public relations department and under them exists an information unit which builds up its own free list. This is another method of dissemination of information which is separate from the AGPS.(10)

The AGPS has now developed a complete bibliography on computer which is available to their staff and to other departments and used in assisting the public making inquiries. There is no depository library system in Australia.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION: WHO NEEDS IT?

As part of its policy of extending the right to know beyond just the programs government departments wanted to publicize the Australian Parliament, after ten years of debate, passed a Freedom of Information Act in 1982. The law became operational on December 1, 1982 and has been amended twice(1983 and 1986). The latter amendments brought in substantial fee increases for the access of government information which many observors in Australia say has now substantially reduced the number of requests being made under the Act. (11)

The Freedom of Information Act, passed the same years as Canada's Access to Information Act and New Zealand's Official Information Act, allows access to government records as well as access to personal files. This is different from the Canadian approach which has two separate Acts(as has the United States) enshrining these rights: the Access to Information Act and the Freedom of Information Act.

The Australian Freedom of Information Act gives a statutory right of access to government documents with certain limited exceptions. There is also a right for individuals to correct their files or have information removed if it is false or misleading. There is a fee of $30 to apply for information and further fees for search and review of documents.

In the event of a denial of access to records there is an appeal to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal who have the power to order release of documents. If one of the principles of the Act are violated, such as excessive fees or long delays or stonewalling by an official, then a complaint can be laid with the Federal Ombudsman who has the power to investigate and try to resolve the case. This system differs from the Canadian experience which allows for an Information Commissioner who can only recommend and not direct release or resolution of a complaint. The power of ordering release is left to the Federal Court(as the courts in the US have the power to order release.)

There has not been extensive education of Australians of their rights under the Act though in the first two years the government did expend some effort to let Australians know about their new rights. Mostly, this has been left up to the private sector. A similar problem of education has existed in Canada. There the Information Commissioner has taken on the role of informing Canadians about their access rights. The lack of an educational role was addressed by the Canadian Parliamentary Committee reviewing the Access and Privacy Acts. They recommended this role be extended as letting people know their rights was a fundamental part of disseminating government information.

Similar recommendations have been made in Australia. The general consensus amongst freedom of information advocates is the need for some for of education. Though some organizations, such as the Public Interest Research Group, based in Sydney, have taken on the role of educating the public it has been a limited one, mostly because of a lack of funds and personnel resources.

There have been no new initiatives to educate Australians further on their access rights. What shall be determined is the extent to which the FOIA will be used or not used in the future. If it declines, as some observors predict it will, this could mean one less avenue of full government information getting out to the people. Though freedom of information is only one small part in the release of government information it is , nonetheless, an important one as it gives the user(requestor) control over the type of information he is seeking rather than having the government determine what information he can receive.

ELECTRONIC DISSEMINATION

TOWARDS A NATIONAL INFORMATION POLICY?

A discussion of the electronic dissemination of government information is left to the end as it is important to first understand that Australia has only reached a comprehensive policy towards the distribution of their government information in the last decade. Before the Australian Government Publishing Service became the stable outlet for the publication of the majority of Commonwealth information policy was generally in disarray. Now that some cohesion and stability has developed a policy towards electronic dissemination is becoming possible. However, this is not easy.

In October, 1983 the Caucus of the Australian Labour Party called for implementation of a National Information Policy(as called for in their Platform.) An

Interdepartmental meeting of relevant departments was formed to develop a policy. The result was a Discussion paper produced by the Department of Science in December, 1985. It's sole focus was the development of a policy for the implementation of utilizing the microelectronics revolution to better Australian life.

The Paper recognized that information is " a key support to the democratic process and to success in social, economic and political life. Australian businesses need ready access to up-to-date scientific and technological information and to financial, economic and market information from both domestic and overseas sources if they are to innovate and compete internationally. A high proportion of the workforce is now employed in information-related occupations, and information goods and services represent a high proportion of Australia's gross domestic product."(12)

The authors emphasized that scientific and technical information is an important component of the information that must be available to researchers and to users for commercial purposes to avoid wasteful duplication.

It is recognized that increasing computerization is important to Australia as they move fully into becoming an Information Society. Also, " the increasing computerization of public sector operations has led to a diversity of electronic databases in various fields within the Commonwealth and State governments, much of it economically valuable. Some is already publicly accessible much is not."(13) This recognizes a point made about the proliferation of databases in both the US and Canada within Government departments. They are widely used internally but there is not wide access by the public at large. Thus a wealth of information which could enhance the country economically and as a whole is not accessible. This is a problem common to most countries and suggests the establishment of bodies which could play a key role in harmonizing the information capabilities. A negative side to such an approach is an organization like this could become an " Information Czar " tyrannizing the rest of society through the vast power at its disposal- the interlinking of extensive databases.

Another point that must be made here is that the Australian government closed down, in late 1986, their statistical database which was servicing the private sector. The reasons for this have not been determined though it is likely it fits into the government's program of fiscal restraint. It also questions how sincere they are about evolving a serious national information policy as information sources(including the FOIA) are being withdrawn ostensibly because of cost problems.

The Paper recognizes that Australia has no coherent information policy on the dissemination of public information nor a central organizing body which could assist in the ` networking ' that goes on in the wired society. It is recognized that the information sector is a key growth sector nationally and internationally and that information industries are expected to achieve growth in production and employment, enhance the range of skilled jobs and improve the balance of payments.

The Paper goes on to recommend that " aspects of existing or potential Government involvement in Australia are:

. specific policies aimed at development or regulation of commercial information industries.

. the nature of the relationship between public sector and private sector providers of information services, including possible networking or interconnection: when should Government provide information, and when should it leave information provision to the private sector?

. whether Government should encourage or impose regulations(eg codes of conduct) on the information industry in the interest of data privacy, social equity, national security, intellectual property protection, or consumer protection. " (14)

TRANSBORDER DATA FLOWS- DOES TBDF REALLY MATTER?

The latter are key questions and issues which arise in any country considering a national information policy. What will become consistently sensitive issues in the future will be: data protection, national security, intellectual property protection and, as stated above in the section on Canada, national security. Australia, because of her position in the world, recognizes the TransBorder Data Flow Debate(TBDF).

" TBDF can result in increasing quantities of information about Australian citizens being available in countries without adequate privacy safeguards. Due to different freedom of information laws, information that remains exempt in Australia may be obtained in other countries. If TBDF allows a person in one country to manipulate data held in another, whose laws or safeguards will apply when fraud or error is involved?

" Any obsolescence in Australian copyright and commercial law caused by new technologies immediately becomes of international concern due to TBDF.

" Australia is heavily dependent on foreign-sourced business and technical information. Such dependence on TBDF to link international databases affords those controlling the databases considerable leverage over the economic potential of others.

" Australian laws and other controls may become ineffective if transnational corporations or others are allowed access to data flow channels outside the public telecommunications system.

" one concern of Government is how to achieve a balance between the potentially conflicting aims of increased economic efficiency on the one hand and maintaining Australia's sovereignty and security and the privacy of its citizens on the other" (15)

This is a lament to be heard in many countries reviewing their information policies and the effects it may have from transmission of information abroad. Sweden was one of the first to communicate its anxieties internationally about this problem when it conducted its vulnerability studies in the late seventies and early eighties. The Australian Discussion Paper appears to be mirroring a world trend.

Australia also is sensitive to the vulnerability question not only because of the information taken out of Australia electronically by transnational corporations but that Australian users have sufficient access to foreign databases.

As to the sovereignty question the authors state that with the " increasingly global nature of electronic information networks, sovereignty can be viewed no longer as simply a matter of physical borders and political allegiances, but also includes considerations of access to, control over and degree of reliance on information resources." (16)

The Paper expressed anxiety about the gap that could be created, with the development of sophisticated databases , between the " information rich " and the " information poor".

" One concern of governments is that the community not be unduly divided into groups which have access to resources such as information and those which do not, ie the 'information rich ' and the ' information poor'.(17)

The Paper goes on to suggest different actions which can be taken such as: " programs designed to improve the supply of and access to information; education and awareness programs and measures to arbitrate between the citizen and information rich bodies(such as governments, media and corporations.)" (18)

This is a concern expressed by many governments as they seek measures to ensure that undue advantages are not created as information technologies become more sophisticated. However, the current dilemma is that many governments in the world are going through periods of fiscal constraint and the question becomes| where are the funds to make information widely available to citizens?

The question is relevant in respect of the Australian Discussion Paper as the Australian Government, a little more than a year after the release of this paper, substantially raised fees for accessing government information. One of the main arguments they used was the " user pay " philosophy. This flies in the face of the concept of " information poor" as the " user-pay " philosophy could mean that access to government databases could be prohibited except to corporations and organizations who are sufficiently wealthy to make use of databases.

The Australian Government does recognize the difficulties in reconciling these disparities and is aware of the cost factor but the question still remains: How shall they handle these dichotomies and inconsistencies in their policies? The Paper states that " it has been estimated that in the next decade, Australian governments will spend a total of over $4 billion on computer-based information systems and databases in a diverse range of areas." (19)

It was stated that " there is a need to consider the role of formal consultative mechanisms at the national level to avoid duplication of effort and the proliferation of incompatible services, and to encourage national networking of public information systems." (20)

The consistent theme throughout the Discussion Paper is that Australia lacks a coordinated information policy or one body that can give the organization and consistency needed to develop that policy. As a result the Paper recommended several options for development of new institutional arrangements for information policy, including:

" . a newly constituted Commonwealth-State coordination body;

. a mechanism for coordination of information policy matters within the Commonwealth Government, such as a standing interdepartmental committee; formal allocations of responsibility for information policy to a minister, supported by a bureaucratic structure; and a representative committee to advise on information matters;

. an Australian Information Utility, established as a statutory body with wide-ranging information provision and advisory functions;

. a consultative body or bodies to link Government, industry and the community; and

. new institutional arrangements in the area of scientific and technological information provision, such as a coordination, referral and marketing body which would act as a link between information repositories and users."(21)

The value of a national information policy would, according to the authors, " provide a broad framework within which the wide range of information-related activities undertaken by the Commonwealth and States can be reconciled. The policy would lead to the development or recognition of policies, principles or practices which cut across portfolio boundaries. Such an approach may be crucial, given the universal importance of information and the pervasiveness and rapid growth of applications of information technology."(22)

DISCUSSIONS ON THE NATIONAL INFORMATION POLICY.

On December 4 and 5, 1985 the Department of Science held a National Information Policy Workshop with participants drawn from business and the trade union movement, the library community, academia, community information bodies, the media and State and Commonwealth Governments and representatives from the Commonwealth Commission for the Future and Telecom. The aim of the workshops were to discuss issues relevant to a national information policy, to identify priority issues and to discuss processes which could assist government action on

the issues. The results were published along with the above Discussion Paper on a National Information Policy.(22)

It is worth quoting some of the findings and conclusions of the participants at length here as it is quite relevant to the study currently being carried out by OTA.

The Honourable Barry Jones, MP, the then Minister of Science, in his opening remarks to the Workshop outlined the themes which concerned him: " change in the nature of work, stressing its information side; the efficiency of industry; the equity issues(ie the ' information rich ' and the 'information poor'); the democracy issues; and the educations issues."(23) The latter is an issue which continually arises when information issues are discussed in Australia and Canada.

The Chairman of the Workshop, in his summary of the proceedings over two days, articulated two perspectives that emerged , which he called " ideological perspectives". " First, Minister Jones' perspective that information is a basic, new vital, and operational perspective for our society; and second, the much milder perspective that information is a ' gap-filling ' concept, an incremental activity." (24) The first group want government to move ahead into these information areas whereas the second group took a much more cautious approach and asked if the issues, especially the economic ones, are not already covered by present concepts and policies.

The Chairman believed, from his two days of observing and synthesizing the issues, that the polarization became blurred as the issues were discussed at length. This is an observation which can be made when discussing any of the countries contemplating information policies.

The issues to emerge in the two day session were:

"- the international value of information-related activities;

- the opportunities of information service to industry (the rural,mining, manufacturing industries) and the whole question of scientific and technological information;

- the whole information infrastructure: initially libraries but now including resources such as databases that have to be considered in the same context;

- information about information: some say we have too much, some say we have too little;

- the belief that community needs and use should drive the activity; community groups have to put pressure on the system;

- the " information rich " and the " information poor" and the effects of technology on these groups;

- lurking in the background of perhaps all of these issues is the place of Telecom and its value as a great community resource;

- the role of the media including commercial TV and commercial newspapers- what place do they take in the information scene?

- the attitudes to information technology: a threat to democracy or an opportunity for economic activity; certainly both; and

- the need for definition: one group says this is vital before we can proceed; others feel that it is perhaps a dangerous sidetrack."(25)

The Minister of Science stressed that there were options to be pursued. Some of these suggested were:

" - the " barnyard door " approach: a continuing and evolving set of principles;

- the " framework " approach: a more detailed statement(or perhaps a set of " guidelines), perhaps approved by Cabinet, within which other elements can operate;

- the whole question of mechanisms, reflecting a degree of impatience with the present scheme and raising the need to consider a standing body, perhaps to provide advice to the Federal Government. " (26)

There have been meetings since this and presentations to the Parliamentary Committee overseeing the development of the policy but no statement has been forthcoming from the Federal Government. However, one can be expected and some form of policy will be articulated by the present Australian Labour Party Government. The question is : what direction will they take? Will it be the development of a national body which will act as a coordinator between all bodies or an advisory body advising both government and the private sector?

There are many options but experience in other jurisdictions would suggest that the creation of a super agency which would control all access to all databases created by the Federal Government would be a poor alternative. Such an agency would take on too much power unto itself and leave room for abuse both by the officials running it and the political party of the day in power. The latter could use it for political ends or means of controlling information to the public and public opinion to suit political ends rather than the public interest. This was part of the problem of Information Canada. Not only was it an organization with a built in potential to be a mere propaganda tool but it was perceived to be a propaganda vehicle for the government of the day. Perception of what an institution is, whether real or imagined, is as important as the actual function.

Perhaps, the Minister of Science, Barry Jones, best summed up the ambivalence of developing an institution to administer and coordinate a national information policy as well as the policy itself when he said:

" If I am right and the implications of information policy are very serious, then if we take action we will benefit greatly, and if we do not, then the detriment will also be great. If I am wrong and the implications are trivial(or even non-existent), then at the worst we will have wasted some time and resources to issues less important and engrossing than the deregulation of the tire industry, self government in the Australian Commonwealth Territory and the future of dried fruits." (27)

CONCLUSIONS

Australia, which was not formed as a confederation until 1901, has taken many years to develop a comprehensive, coordinated policy for the printing, publishing and disseminating of their federal government information. However, after many years, different departments being responsible, organizational changes and experiments as to how to disseminate their information, the country has an excellent system in place. Government information is readily in place in key cities and there are inquiry centres in all capital cities in the Commonwealth. In conjunction with this the States, acting independently for the last two centuries, developed comprehensive policies early on and the citizens of all the states are well served in receiving government information.

As to Freedom of Information laws, which enshrines in law the right of the citizen to know what its government is doing and why, only the Federal Government and the State of Victoria have passed such laws. The spirit of openness is not as clear in Australia and as deeply enshrined as it is in the United States and Canada. The reasons why are partly clouded by the Commonwealth Government's recent fiscal restraint policies and the desire to implement the user pay philosophy. This could act as a limitation if transferred to the development of a National Information Policy, in regards to the electronic dissemination of information. However, the State of Victoria charges no fees for the use of their FOI Act and there exists a spirit of giving to the citizen as much as is allowed by law. The State of Western Australia has recently introduced a Freedom of Information Bill. New South Wales have promised one for many years but no action has been taken in recent years.

It is clear that the current Labour Party Government is interested in developing a clear and concise National Information Policy but as there are so many divergent elements at work it could be a number of years before any comprehensive statement is forthcoming from the government. Experience of Data Protection laws in the Scandinavian and European countries, where the overseers of these laws, the registrars, are now tending to make decisions which seem to work against the individual, act as an example of hov institutions are not necessarily the best course to take to direct the future of the information society. Many data protection administrators are making decisions regarding the privacy of the individual in place of the individual. This means that the state are making decisions in place of the individual thus making the state the arbiter in areas of peoples lives which was was thought sacrosanct and absolute- the privacy of the individual.

SOME PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES

Another element to consider is that the pace of technology is so rapid and ever changing that between the time of the writing of this paper and the reading by the individual , progressive technological changes will have been made which will have long range effects on all of us. Technological change occurs and is now measured in terms of days whereas a mere decade ago such change was measured in months and a century ago it was measured in years and decades.

A law could be stated about this phenomenon as to why governments should play a minimum role in the development and dissemination of technology and resultant software. Postulated below is an observation as to why government should restrict themselves to using the technology developed by government to simply disseminate their information and leave other functions to the private sector.

OBSERVATION:

The time lag in government between the conception of an idea and implementation and resultant effect on society is measured in months and years.

The dynamic propelling the development of nev technology and the resultant implementation and effects on society is now measured in weeks.

It is for this reason that technology, its expansion and ramifications upon society, should not be controlled by government. Technology today is finding its level in society and implemented according to the demands of the market place.

Government inertia precludes creating an effect on technology's impact on society.

Footnotes:

1. Cherns, J.J., Official Publishing: An Overview,,An International Survey and Review of the Role, Organization and Principles of Official Publishing. p.22, Pergammon Press, Toronto,1979

2. IBID, p. 22

3. IBID p.23

4. Hansard, 2 March, 1976, Col. 455, Australian Commonwealth House of Representatives, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1976.

5. Cherns, J.J., Op. Cit. p.25

6. IBID p.31

7. IBID p.47

8. IBID p.47

9. IBID p.48

10. IBID p.48

11. Interviews by author with academics and users in Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne, August 1-6, 1987.

12. Discussion Paper, A National Information Policy for Australia, Department of Science, Canberra, December, 1985, p.1

13. IBID. p.2

14. IBID pp. 2-3

15. IBID p.4

16. IBID p.45

17. IBID p.3

18. IBID p.3

19. IBID p.5

20. IBID p.5

21. IBID p.6

22. National Information Policy Workshop Proceedings and Report of the Workshop, Canberra, December 3-4, 1985, Department of Science, p. 2

23. IBID p.55

24. IBID p.55

25. IBID. p 56

26. IBID pp.56-57

27. IBID p.57

SINGAPORE

INTRODUCTION

Singapore was chosen as part of this study because it is a developing country and a former British colony fitting into the Westminster style of Government. It is interesting to look at because it has achieved so much for a small country. It is located on 65 hectares and has a population of 2.5 million(as of 1986.) Because it occupies such a small space 85% of the population now live in high rise buildings. It depends on its position and survival in the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) as an international trade centre, international convention centre and tourist attraction. One of its major sources of capital is foreign investment(which accounts for 95% of all investment). Singapore has just come out of a devastating two year recession. In 1985 foreign investment shrunk to a trickle resulting in the collapse of the stock market and loss of thousands of jobs. Investment in the first half of this year was U.S.$450 million and played a large part in their recovery.

The Republic of Singapore has a unicameral parliament. The ruling party has been in power since before they achieved independence(when they broke away from Malaysia in 1965) and since gaining independence from Great Britain(in 1963). There is only one member of the Opposition. It is a highly regulated society which appears to follow the British system of government in form only. It has four official languages: English, Mandarin Chinese, Indonesian and Tamil. Cantonese Chinese is also widely spoken. English is the official language of the government and for all government publications of debates. However, information going to the people will be found in the four official languages. The Chinese comprise the majority of the population. It is a thriving nation that has fared well. It is moving well into the information society and has comprehensive technology and information technology courses at its polytechnic school and university.

The government of Singapore sees its main job as setting clear policies and directions, and providing a "supportive environment for Information Technology to develop. The National Computer Board has been set up basically for this purpose. The government's role is to ensure that Singapore is a good and convenient place to do business."(1) Thus Singapore is alert to the need to exploit information technology and to have in place an infrastructure which will easily move the country into the information society. It has had a National Computer Board for many years.

The emphasis in the Singapore government is bringing the population into the information society and making its populace eligible for jobs which require such skills. Many of the American, French and British multinationals(and others) in Singapore have a high percentage of Singapore citizens as employees(including those in top management positions).(2)

INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND ELECTRONIC DISSEMINATION

On the spot study of the system in Singapore indicated a strong move into the information society but this was reflected more in the private sector than in government. The government of Singapore has moved into a high state of technology with many of its departments computerized and using the new microelectronic technology. However, a search for government databases provided by Singapore revealed none in existence at this writing.(3)

However, there is an extensive computerized and videotext system in use at Changi International airport(Singapore's international airport) and throughout the hotels and in the many shopping complexes, which set out services available in Singapore and basic services accessible by the local citizen and the visitor to Singapore. These are in English and provided by the Government.

Prior to independence government information was released through the Department of Public Relations(in 1950) followed by conversion into the Department of Information(1951) and the Government Printing Office. The former was abolished in 1965(at the time of the break with Malaysia) and the latter in 1971. The government's main channel of communication of information to the public is through the Ministry of Culture. This ministry controls the National Library, the National Museum, the Archives and Record Centre and the Board of Film Censors. Its publicity division is active in the dissemination of information on semi-political levels and produces and distributes two newssheets: The Mirror(a free publication- it informs the

public, who have requested to be on the mailing list) about government activities) and the Singapore Bulletin(which deals mainly with news about the ASEAN- The Association of Southeast Asia Nations). Two other publications are the Mirror of Opinion, circulated mostly to government officials, which a daily digest of the Singapore press, the Singapore Yearbook and Singapore Facts and Figures. The latter are important as they are sold widely by the Ministry of Culture to the public and book trade.(4) These publications assist Singapore in the promotion of themselves to both the international business sector and to the tourist/travel industry.

Another element of publicity and dissemination by the government is the use of film and audio-visual material to inform the public. This is quite evident when visiting Singapore. The country is very nationalistic and a strong sense of patriotism imbues the populace. August 9 is their national independence day and a state holiday. There were extensive films on television in celebration of this event, including the singing of the national day theme song, We are Singaporeans, and use of films at the National Carnival to train Singaporeans on various aspects of life in Singapore.

This is evident at all levels of society. It is possible to postulate that as such attention is paid to the dissemination of not only information but ideas and idealism to the populace the use of computers to disseminate government information is probably not far enough. This can be said because there is much evidence to show the extent to which the Singapore government is going to train their youth in computer technology. As those being trained are those who will shortly be the government professional, managers and future leaders, it is obvious to say that electronic dissemination will play a large role in Singapore's future.

Singapore National Printers replaced the Government Printer and is run as a state enterprise, existing to publish but to recoup all its costs(which it does). They produce and publish parliamentary, statutory and regulatory publications of the Singapore government. These are priced to recover their full cost and are sold to the public, government departments and Parliament. There are severe restrictions on free distribution. The board of directors consists of four civil servants and three members from the private sector. Singapore National Printers operate a Public Sales Division, located in the centre of Singapore, which offers the publications for sale.

A daily Hansard is published of debates in Parliament but it takes a week to produce(members are allowed to make corrections of their speeches and check the galleys for this.) However, only about 250 a day are sold(again as a cost saving measure.) The depository system exists but according to researchers the copies received by the National Library is spotty(they are supposed to receive five copies). The National Library also produces an annual bibliography of all publications produced in Singapore but does not differentiate between government and privately produced publications. This can be confusing. It also takes a year to publish.(5)

CONCLUSIONS

Considering its size and the different methods used to communicate information , Singapore has done well for a developing country. Because of its unique position in South East Asia and its reputation as a dynamic, solvent and prosperous nation, it has been to the government's benefit to get information to both its own citizens and outside private business interests it has wanted to attract.

It's unique position has also made it sensitive to its future needs and survival. The government knows the future of Singapore rests in being fully in tune and abreast of the information age and the microelectronics revolution now going on. Evidence of programs to achieve this abound through a cursory inspection of Singapore- the country and its people. It is technologically up to speed with many other of the western industrialized countries. Its moves to bring its people into the new technological age can only mean that eventually its information will be disseminated widely in an electronic format.

For the moment there is very little of this going on but change is occurring. There will be many new developments because the Government of Singapore is so sensitive to the educational requirements needed to keep their small country abreast with the rest of the industrialized world with which it competes. Information, and the dissemination of it, will be very much a part of that future.

Footnotes

1. Leng, Yeo Khee, National Computer Board, Singapore, " Singapore moving into the Information Age.," Transnational Data and Communications Report, pp.14-16, October, 1986, PO Box 2039, Springfield, VA,22152, U.S.A.

2. Based on discussions with citizens of Singapore and study of local material by author, August 8-9, 1987

3. Results of research by Standard Information and Research Systems, Toronto, Canada, August, 1987

4. Cherns, J.J., Official Publishing: An Overview, Pergammon Press, London, 1979 p.223

5. IBID p. 225

JAPAN

A cursory review of publishing policies in Japan has some relevance as there is a perception that Japan may be challenging U.S. leadership, particularly in regards to the electronic dissemination of information. This is not so.

There is currently no means or methods whereby government information in Japan is disseminated electronically to the public. According to interviews with an information expert in Japan and with an official with the Japan External Trade Organization(JETRO) government databases are not available to the public. There are exchanges of information, kept in databases, between governments. These exchanges concern mostly statistical data and trade information. They are exchanged as a result of normal treaties between countries(such as the U.S. and Canada) where such exchanges are beneficial to each other.But there are no commercial databases emanating from the Japanese government.

The Japanese government has normal dissemination of government information policies found in most countries in the democracies(and in others.) In Japan the Ministry of Finance print and publish all government publications. There are government bookstores in cities and towns across Japan which sell these government publications which range from books, to statistical reports, studies from the Prime Minister's Office and reports of Committees in the DIET.

The Japan External Trade Organization(JETRO) has offices in 80 cities around the world. They are a government funded organization(similar to a Quango in the UK and Crown Corporation in Canada). They were established under a special law and come under the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Their function is to take information the Japanese government wants to have published in English, translate it from the Japanese and sell it on foreign markets. For example, the Japanese Ministry of Trade and Industry recently published a White Paper on international trade. JETRO was asked to translate and disseminate the information in foreign countries. There are numerous offices in the U.S., including Washington, D.C.

JETRO's job is to translate Japanese trade and industry figures to the world. Apart from this organization there is no other means of disseminating information, in Japanese or English around the world, with the exception of normal

dissemination of information through embassies and consulates. In the latter instance normal embassy practice is in place. Information on Japan can be found in the language of the country where Japan is represented. It covers mostly tourism and industry as well as vital statistics on Japan.

Japan is considering a Freedom of Information law on the national level. At the present time there are freedom of information laws at the prefect level(like municipality in the U.S. and Canada). There is such a law in Tokyo and it appears to be working well. Like the laws in other countries it is another instrument to disseminate government information to a public who want to seek out information in this manner. There are indications that a freedom of information law , on the national level,will not be forthcoming for a number of years though a Data Protection Act is expected to be introduced into the DIET in the near future.

It is a source of amazement to some that Japan, which is so technologically advanced, has not implemented electronic dissemination of government information. This point has been checked carefully and this is the case.

THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES(EC)

INTRODUCTION

This final phase of the report shall look at one international organization, the European Communities(EC) because of its unique role in European affairs and because it, along with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development(OECD), has done so much in developing electronic databases. Both are important because of the vital role they play in the economic livelihoods of their member countries and because of the necessity to keep partner countries informed in one way or another. A brief look will be taken at the EC overall information polices but special emphasis shall be placed on their electronic databases.

THE EC ITSELF

The European Communities, originally formed as the Common Market, has its headquarters in Brussels. It is composed of:

- the Council of Ministers, foreign secretaries of all member countries, it receives proposals from the Commission, the main body responsible for formulation and implementation of policy;

- the European Parliament;

- the Economic and Social Committee and the Court of Justice.

As it has a diversity of interests to satisfy, its structure for disseminating information is geared to its particular needs. There is a Director-General for Information. The Director is responsible to the Commission. They consist of information units on particular subjects as well as having units dealing with visits, publications, programming and audio-visual material. The group has a spokesman who is responsible for briefing the press

regularly. There is a spokesman at the EC headquarters in Brussels who does daily press briefings. There are also spokesmen in the national capitals who do briefings as required as well as acting as information officers.(1)

EC INFORMATION POLICIES- WHO DOES WHAT?

There are four ranges of publications. The Official Journal of the European Committee published in six languages(English, French, Italian, Dutch, German and Danish). This is the official gazette of the EC and is composed of various headings, legislation, information and notices, which reflect its functions. It provides decisions of the Council of Ministers as well as legal and technical matters, decisions of the European Parliament, recommendations to the Council of Ministers by the European Committee as well as formal pronouncements, enactment notices and Council Directives.

There are also three other types of publications: annual general report of the Commission, a range of periodicals(ranging from political and economic matters to tourist publications) and monographs(as needed.)(2)

Most EC publications are free because of the diversity of subjects, the different countries being served and the multitude of experts the Commission feels they need to reach. The Directorate of Information has extensive free lists throughout the member countries and into some observer countries which are updated periodically. The free list represents a substantial expenditure on the part of the EC but it is felt worth while as part of their mandate.

The Council of Ministers, the European Parliament and the Court of Justice also have their own publishing and distribution units. The Council publishes its own treaties as well as its own acts and decisions. An annual review of the Council is published and widely distributed. The Parliament publishes its own proceedings the next day and they are available in a multitude of languages.(3)

ELECTRONIC DISSEMINATION

The EC has moved well into the electronic information market. Due to the nature of the organization it has been sensitive to the needs of disseminating information rapidly and widely to not only its member countries but to other countries, such as the USA and Japan, who are major trading partners and with whom they also compete.

From the period 1975-1983 the European Community developed three action plans to better conditions for the European specialized information market. In 1984 it developed a plan for broader development than in their previous years. This plan pursues the following goals:

" . improving the information environment and development conditions for the European specialized information market by overcoming existing technical, language, commercial and other obstacles;

. promoting and strengthening European information services in those sectors in which the European Community has an interest by innovative developments."(4)

The special areas of emphasis in the plan for innovative development were:" patent information, biotechnology information, information integrated network, materials databases, electronic publishing, industry information, reducing the difference in the provision of specialized information in the different European regions."(5) This plan is being activated in conjunction with member states and the goal is to create a favourable electronic specialized information market for all members.

A survey of accessible, on-line databases indicates the range of information now being researched,compiled and collated within the EC. It also mirrors the volume of information available. The databases have been compiled and released by the EC Statistical Office(EUROSTAT).

CRONOS-EUROSTAT

This is an on-line service produced by (EUROSTAT) and accessible through private information brokers such as ADP Data Services and CISI-Wharton Econometric Forecasting Associates Ltd. It contains over 900,000 time series of economic data on countries in the EC and other countries worldwide. Most of the data is also available in printed EUROSTAT publications. It breaks down as follows:

General Statistics: Contains 50,000 time series, updated semimonthly, of shortterm indicators and general economic information covering industry, agriculture, services, transportation, population, employment, trade, prices, finance and balance of payments.

National Accounts, Finance, Balance of Payments: Contains 25,000 series(since 1960) on aggregate national account data, series on national account transactions and other related economic information.

Industry and Services: Contains 12,500 series from annual industrial surveys aggregated in accordance with the activities of the EC; 30,000 annual and quarterly series on production and foreign trade for industrial products. 23,500 series on annual energy balances and monthly statistics for production, stocks, and exchanges and monthly series (since 1973) on production, supplies, stocks and exchanges(as well as data on the steelmaking industry.

Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing: Contains 7,500 monthly series on the product sales price and purchase price of agricultural commodities; monthly series on exports of agricultural products and other relevant agricultural data.

Foreign Trade. Contains 185,000 quarterly and monthly series(since 1970) on international trade relations by product and trading partner; quarterly series on imports of 250 basic products; and 127,000 annual series on foreign trade. (6)

REGIO-EUROSTAT

This is an on-line database produced by EUROSTAT and available through CISI-Wharton Econometric Forecasting Associates. A subscription fee of 3000 French Francs payable to CSI-Wharton is required for access. It is available in Belgium, Denmark, Federal Republic of Germany, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and U.K.as well as the U.S. It contains about 150 time series of economic data on various regions in countries of the EEC. Covers demographic population, agriculture, industry and finance.(7)

COMEXT-EUROSTAT

Produced by EUROSTAT, updated monthly and distributed by CISI-Wharton Econometric Forecasting Associates Ltd.. Covers the EC countries and all trading partners worldwide. The database contains about 3 million monthly time series on trade between EEC countries and all their trading partners.(8)

CONCLUSIONS

The range of information distributed by the EC appears to be greater than any other international organization with the exception of the OECD. The EC databases are prototypes for the types of information which should be made obtainable in both the public and private sectors. The amount of information generated by their various organizations has made the EC organization information rich. They are able to share the information with their partner countries and any end user who wants to make use of the information. It is a by-product of the EC not conceived of by their Founders. In an Information Age such as ours the organization of such information becomes important.

Other international organizations have information programs, such as UNESCO and the International Atomic Energy Agency(IAEA) but they are not as extensive as those produced by the EC. The IAEA has developed an information bank called the " International Nuclear Information System(INIS). It has done this together with 73 countries and 11 international organizations.

The OECD(Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development with 24 member countries)) has expressed the desire to strengthen the multilateral cooperation of all western nations. The questions of the industrial nations' information, computer and communications policies is being discussed in committee. All ramifications of the development of such information policies, including the economic, legal and sociopolitical problems of transborder data flow, and their implications, are being discussed. Joint positions with international organizations(such as the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade- GATT) are being worked out and debate and discussion is ongoing. There are many programs in which member countries can participate.(9)

The EC has been a suitable organization to study for this research project as its quest for more in-depth policies to further develop information databases aligns with the work of the USA. The latter is considered the most advanced nation in the world in this regard.(10)

FOOTNOTES

1. Cherns, J.J., Official Publishing: An Overview, Pergammon Press, London, UK, p.342

2. IBID p.343

3. IBID p.344

4. Specialized Information, Program of Federal Government 1985-1988, The Federal Minister for Research and Technology, Public Relations Office, Bonn, 1985, p.70

5. IBID p.70

6. Directory of On-line Databases, Vol. 8., no. 1, p.93

7. IBID p.296

8. IBID p.81

9. Specialized Information, OP. Cit. p.70

10. IBID p.70

ANALYSIS AND TRENDS

INTRODUCTION

The Microelectronics Revolution and the Information Age are two terms which are close to becoming well-worn cliches if not at least phrases forming a natural part of our language. Often, we use these terms interchangeably and with such ease and familiarity it assumes a grasp of what they mean. Yet, the implications of what these terms stand for are only beginning to be grasped. They are important to address for the purposes of this study.

One aspect of these terms is a trend towards the total reliance by many sectors of business on the computer, and the information transmitted through use of the technology, for the daily operations of their business. This phenomenon has been identified as the " World Information Economy". In the context of this study something needs to be said about this as it relates so directly to the economies of the industrialized nations. Also, many countries form a large part of their electronic information dissemination polices with the view towards servicing different industries in the business world. This is done to constructively contribute to the nation's economic growth and continuing health.

THE WORLD INFORMATION ECONOOMY.

The term first came into use a few years ago. It was an outgrowth of the more cumbersome term " transborder data flows " which reflected the concerns over the millions of pieces of data flowing across international borders and the barriers that could be placed on those flows. The term the world information economy more succinctly addresses what the debate is about: how the restraints put on the flow of information across borders could influence a nation's economy and ability to conduct business around the world.

The transition from the industrialized society of the last generation to an information economy, represents one of the most significant societal developments in the last two centuries.

The information economy itself is so new that many in business and government have a difficult time grasping the concept let alone the implications. But the information economy has become so prevalent today that more than 70 percent of all workers in the United States are involved in information related jobs, compared to 17 percent in 1950.

Multinational corporations have come to realize in the last decade that information is a commodity in itself. There are approximately 7,000 databases in the United States offering specialized data services ranging from electronic news services, legal cases, medical information, financial information and the stock market.

The development of the computer from the mainframe to the microcomputer has brought information to the fingertips of any executive or manager with a personal computer or a terminal to tap into a main database. International networks within multinationals or through available commercial carriers and interdepartmental access within government has meant instantaneous access to databases around the world. Today trade in information services has become as important as trade in commodities.

The economic impact of this phenomenon is so new that many corporate executives and politicians have only recently started moving their attention towards developing information policies relevant to the changing times. This is due in part to the traditional protectionist policies developed of less developed countries.

While the United States, Japan, Canada, West Germany and France and other major developed countries understand the benefits of the information economy, the developing countries fear they may be left out. As the international information economy depends on the free flow of information- not only between corporate branches and across borders but in space- the United States has been particularly sensitive to possible restrictions. Other countries , in this study, who have been aware of similar possible restrictions in the flow of their electronic information are: West Germany, Canada, Australia, France and Singapore.

There are six key issues, common to most countries, which could restrict the free flow of information:

. Privacy.

. Public interest- which is defined according to the criteria developed in each country. Some countries, for example, require that hardware be produced locally(Brazil is one such example.)

. Cultural and societal integrity- Many countries worry about information which concerns their citizens and fret that commercial information from their country would be stored in another country.(Sweden is one example of this. An extensive study on " Vulnerability and Computers " , done in the late nineteen-seventies, made much of this point. It is for this reason their Data Protection Act requires the

issuing of a license for personal information on automated databases being transferred out of the country.

. Safeguarding national security and national sovereignty- Some countries use this as a reason to limit information flows which might diminish their control of public opinion.

. Protection from foreign competition- The issue most fundamental to the free trade vs. protectionism debate.

. Sale of services- i.e. data processing.

The transportability of goods, in the information economy, becomes a problem because it is difficult to determine, for example, when something is stolen and when it is simply being transported between branches of a corporation or from company to customer. Then there is the question of how to devise international rules for information trade when so many nations hold so many different views. Responses to some of these issues have been forthcoming in many debates and different solutions have been made. Some have suggested that information trade should be included under industrial trade while others have preferred that new international rules and regulations be developed.

That new electronic rules of the road will be forthcoming within the decade there is no doubt. The importance for the future for the industrial countries, while these issues are being developed, is that world economies continue to develop without undue impediments from countries perhaps using the vast flow of information through their countries as a means to get their share of the economic pie.

It is for these reasons that an understanding of the world information economy is integral to any study of the electronic dissemination of government information.

INFORMATION TRENDS

In each of the countries that have developed or are developing information policies, such as Australia and West Germany, the clear emphasis has been on contributing to the nation's economy. From this flows all other reasons for getting information out electronically to the different publics who are interested in utilizing such information.

When looking at other countries, such as Canada and the United Kingdom, it is clear that the biggest producer of databases are the Bureaus of Statistics. This again stresses the point that the users most interested in these databases are the business sector. This is not to de-emphasize the uses made of these databases for other reasons. The job of all government is to deal with all facets of life and society and the development of specialized information databases in the Federal Republic of Germany certainly reflects this.

The development of specialized medical banks in West Germany , along with databases listing toxic substances and chemicals harmful in the workplace, is another reflection of the areas government is concerned with. Another example is in Canada where the Federal Government funds the Centre for Occupational Health Hazards and Safety. It not only lists all toxic substances and their dangers but is a service available for the basic information as well as how to handle it. As we in the twentieth century know there is little part of our lives with which government does not play some part. The emerging Microelectronics Age, means there may be no part of our life in which government does not play a role.

Technology has brought with it many new questions and issues not accounted for by our forefathers when the respective constitutions and laws of different countries were developed. This means, essentially, that the approach in developing policies for the electronic dissemination of government information is going to have to be a reasoned and careful one.

This study shows that in many countries, such as Canada and West Germany, there is an aversion to the establishment of one agency which would deal solely with the implementation of a unified information policy for the country. The lessons of history, especially of the tendency of institutions to become intrusive into the affairs of individuals and overbearing when given to many powers, leads to the conclusion that there should be no one super agency responsible for overall implementation of a national policy.

This does not mean national policies are not needed. If anything, most countries are moving too slowly in this direction and are , in some cases such as Australia, retrogressive, much to the detriment of their countries.

Fiscal restraints have acted as a barrier for the development of policies in some countries whereas in others it is due to a feeling nothing much needs to be done or because many in government feel the private sector should take up the job of handling databases.

Countries such as France and Canada, which have Freedom of Information Acts and a bureaucracy which reflect an attitude of openness, are working towards electronic dissemination policies. Their goals have been to get more information to the people though, in Canada's case, in a more limited way than was planned by the architects of the Access to Information Act.

Australia, which has a Freedom of Information Act but a government that is antagonistic to its goals and purposes, is currently going through a stage of less information to the public. In particular, the Australian Commonwealth Government closed down access to their statistical database in 1986 and levied higher fees for their Freedom of Information Act, virtually cutting off access by consumers. Australia is developing a National Information Policy but it appears to be momentarily halted as the government suffers a bout of information retardation.

The Federal Republic of Germany is an exception to the rule that an attitude of openness leads to a more open government. The federal government have developed a comprehensive specialized information policy in order to get information to the people and the business sector in particular. To assist the West German private sector the government works closely with the EC and other international organizations in order to make German data available abroad Conversely, they are working to develop ways to make international specialized information more accessible to the German people.

One of the problems of making information available throughout the European countries is that of language, historical and national barriers. It is for this reason the EC and the OECD will take increasingly more important roles in compiling and disseminating electronic information to its member countries and trading partners. The United Kingdom, as a member of the EC, might thus develop more open information policies.

CONCLUSION

Development of electronic databases to disseminate government information to the people precludes the attitude that information should be available to the people. However, because there are various degrees of secrecy within all the

countries studied, and especially in the European countries, it is possible that the trend will be towards putting specialized information onto databanks. This will continue to give government the control over the information they want to impart to the public.

However, apart from the openness question, this study shows that governments are sensitive to the developing world information economy and are taking appropriate steps to utilize the new technologies to their benefit. It is also evident that each country has evolved clear information policies to disseminate their general information but the approach taken in many countries has been quite different. What is not so clear, in many countries, is to what extent governments will evolve coherent electronic dissemination policies.

The vast amount of government information now being processed by governments has forced the development of electronic databases as a means of distribution of government information. But as the ideas vary from country to country as to how much government information should be disseminated there is no way to predict, at this point, precisely how sophisticated or extensive different government dissemination policies will become.

The amount of funds contributed by different countries to the development of information policies has not been available except for West Germany. However, all countries have spent considerable resources over the years in the development of their information policies and this trend can be expected to carry over into the field of electronic dissemination.

As has been stated throughout this study the U.S. Government far and away leads the rest of the world in its dissemination of electronic information. Many countries will look to the OTA study as a reference point for future policies. Conversely, there is much many countries have done which can be of use to the OTA in evolving this current policy study and the recommendations to emerge from it.

THE " QUICK FIX " AGE

Information is the wave of the future upon which we in the industrialized nations are now riding. Governments are aware of the information trends, the importance of microelectronics, the need to keep the private business sector fully informed and to use the new technologies to better govern all areas of society.

We are quickly moving into what might be called: the "Quick Fix " Age. Increasingly, administrators, businessmen

and politicians want fast answers to solve problems quickly. Technology has brought with it an impatience to sit back and think it out, to develop reasonable solutions over a period of time. The pace at which we move, in tandem with our technology, demands the quick fix. This is another reason why it is important that more information, not less, be accessible to those who have to make decisions. It is even more urgent and important that the information be available in a digestible and comprehensive form. Decisions are based on the input of data which leads to the certainty of what should be the solution.

QUESTION WHICH HAVE ARISEN

From these observations many questions arise that will need to be addressed by different governments, including the United States, when developing electronic information polices.

. Should Governments make more information widely available through electronic networks than currently exists?

. How much money should be allocated to the development of electronic information policies?

. Should a country have a unified electronic information policy or should it be developed piecemeal through individual government departments according to their needs?

. Who should oversee such a policy? An "Information Institute " which would oversee all policies and implementations?

. Or should there be a unified government policy but no one institution or minister in charge in order to avoid bureaucratic entanglement and abuse? Is there a danger in Information Czars being created which would adversely effect democratic institutions?

. Should electronic databases be extended as widely as possible to make as much information as possible available to all sectors of society?

. Should information currently being released under Freedom of Information Acts be processed into databanks and be made readily available to future users?

. To what extent should information in government data banks be indexed so it is more easily accessible?

. What policies should be developed to ensure government information will be accessible in other countries ?

. Should electronic rules of the road be developed for the dissemination of government information?

. Are international treaties needed?

. Should all countries, who share government information with each other, adopt privacy codes which harmonize with each member country?

. Are international treaties needed to ensure that vital economic information is available to all trading partners and not restricted to the few?

. How accessible should electronic government data banks be to people in general?

These are just a few of the questions which have arisen as a result of this study. There will be many more questions which will evolve. Suffice to say, this is a new area and it is only in recent times that studies have been conducted to determine some of the trends. There is still a surfeit of information on what governments are doing in this field because there have been so few studies.

When it comes to the electronic dissemination of government information many governments are still groping in the dark.

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